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All Work and No Pay: How Labor Force Demographics Explain Regional Variation in the Arab Spring Uprisings

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Abstract

Despite scholarly and popular hopes and predictions that the 2011 Arab Spring would mean the end of authoritarianism and the onset of democracy across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, anti-regime uprisings only occurred in a small subset of MENA nations. This thesis aims to address the puzzle of the Arab Spring's partial contagion; the main interest of this work is to explore why the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries in particular escaped the Arab Spring virtually unscathed. The hypothesis offered here argues that the regional variation in the Arab Spring uprisings can be explained by labor force demographics in the GCC. Dominated by non-Arab, Asian migrant laborers, GCC workforces depend on the exploitative *kafala* sponsorship system that ties migrant workers to Gulf employers in a mode of quasi-indentured servitude. The *kafala* system and the labor force demographics it has created in the GCC are significant to the Arab Spring uprisings in two ways: first, migrant workers strike and protest their living and working conditions often, and suffer harsh consequences as a result. Gulf migrant workers' collective action and the punishments that they endure operated as a mode of demonstration effect that deterred Gulf citizens from engaging in similar behavior against their respective governments. Second, Asian migrant workers recruited through the *kafala* system have supplanted intraregional labor imports from poorer MENA nations such as Egypt and Tunisia; the preference of GCC employers for Asian migrant workers has meant increases in unemployment in non-GCC MENA countries, which contributed to the mass discontentment and lack of upward social mobility that resulted in upheaval in these nations and some others, including Libya, Yemen, and Syria. The economic preconditions of Gulf countries – major oil and construction industries, high GDP, and low domestic unemployment – allow for the *kafala* system to exist. Unlike existing explanations for regional variation during the Arab Spring uprisings, including hereditary succession, the use of social media, cultural diversity and oil wealth, the demographic makeup of countries' labor forces consistently separates GCC nations from those that experienced mass uprising and unrest. This thesis marshals quantitative evidence and a selection of case studies of specific countries – Libya, Bahrain, and Qatar – to demonstrate why labor force demographics matter to political behavior and outcomes in the context of the Arab Spring. Ultimately, the exigencies of the GCC labor markets make complete, meaningful, or sustained transition away from authoritarianism toward democracy unlikely in the entirety of the MENA region in the foreseeable future.

Keywords

Arab Spring, Gulf Cooperation Council, labor markets, labor force, Middle East and North Africa (MENA), *kafala*, Political Science, Alex Weisiger, Weisiger, Alex

Disciplines

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All Work and No Pay: How Labor Force Demographics Explain Regional Variation in the Arab Spring Uprisings

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Senior Honors Thesis in Political Science

University of Pennsylvania

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For my parents, who taught me the importance of asking the hard questions and who continue to give me every opportunity to learn how to answer them. I am forever in your debt.

Abstract

Despite scholarly and popular hopes and predictions that the 2011 Arab Spring would mean the end of authoritarianism and the onset of democracy across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, anti-regime uprisings only occurred in a small subset of MENA nations. This thesis aims to address the puzzle of the Arab Spring's partial contagion; the main interest of this work is to explore why the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries in particular escaped the Arab Spring virtually unscathed. The hypothesis offered here argues that the regional variation in the Arab Spring uprisings can be explained by labor force demographics in the GCC. Dominated by non-Arab, Asian migrant laborers, GCC workforces depend on the exploitative *kafala* sponsorship system that ties migrant workers to Gulf employers in a mode of quasi-indentured servitude. The *kafala* system and the labor force demographics it has created in the GCC are significant to the Arab Spring uprisings in two ways: first, migrant workers strike and protest their living and working conditions often, and suffer harsh consequences as a result. Gulf migrant workers' collective action and the punishments that they endure operated as a mode of demonstration effect that deterred Gulf citizens from engaging in similar behavior against their respective governments. Second, Asian migrant workers recruited through the *kafala* system have supplanted intraregional labor imports from poorer MENA nations such as Egypt and Tunisia; the preference of GCC employers for Asian migrant workers has meant increases in unemployment in non-GCC MENA countries, which contributed to the mass discontentment and lack of upward social mobility that resulted in upheaval in these nations and some others, including Libya, Yemen, and Syria. The economic preconditions of Gulf countries – major oil and construction industries, high GDP, and low domestic unemployment – allow for the *kafala* system to exist. Unlike existing explanations for regional variation during the Arab Spring uprisings, including hereditary succession, the use of social media, cultural diversity and oil wealth, the demographic makeup of countries' labor forces consistently separates GCC nations from those that experienced mass uprising and unrest. This thesis marshals quantitative evidence and a selection of case studies of specific countries – Libya, Bahrain, and Qatar – to demonstrate why labor force demographics matter to political behavior and outcomes in the context of the Arab Spring. Ultimately, the exigencies of the GCC labor markets make complete, meaningful, or sustained transition away from authoritarianism toward democracy unlikely in the entirety of the MENA region in the foreseeable future.

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Chapter I: The Puzzle

Introduction

The self-immolation of Tunisian street vendor Mohammed Bouazizi in December 2010 began a seemingly contagious regional mass social movement for political and socioeconomic change in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Bouazizi, an unlicensed fruit peddler in Tunisia, doused himself in gasoline in response to “just one of the thousands of petty indignities Tunisians had been forced to swallow their whole lives;” this act “set in motion the region’s most tumultuous change for more than half a century.”¹ Upheaval spread from Tunisia to Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria, unseating dictators and plunging countries into protracted civil conflict. Countries including Jordan, Algeria, Oman and Bahrain also experienced some milder anti-government protests, but these demonstrations did not result in total upheaval or regime collapse. This regional tumult, born of demands for more representative government and better economic opportunities for upward social mobility,² was termed the “Arab Spring.”³

The driving force behind the Arab Spring was mass discontentment with political and socioeconomic status quos. Historically, the MENA region has been dominated by oppressive non-democratic governments; modern authoritarian regimes remain largely concentrated in the MENA region, and these governments have survived without democracy threatening to gain a serious foothold until growing youth populations began to demand more dignified livelihoods and more job opportunities in 2011.⁴ According to the United Nations, people aged 15-24 (“youth”) are a dominant age bracket in the MENA region, and unemployment among youth in

¹ Paul Danahar, *The New Middle East: The World After the Arab Spring* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 42.

² Danahar, *The New Middle East*, 6.

³ Filipe R. Campante and Davin Chor, "Why was the Arab World Poised for Revolution? Schooling, Economic Opportunities, and the Arab Spring," *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 26, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 167, accessed November 10, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41495309>.

⁴ Danahar, *The New Middle East*, 6.

MENA is the highest of any world region.⁵ Frustrated with little or no potential for upward social mobility due to a general lack of employment opportunities, youth in MENA nations “[became] the force behind the historical uprisings in the region, demanding change.”⁶ Youth led charges against “unpopular repressive leader[s]” in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Syria and Yemen, overthrowing autocrats in the first three of those nations and igniting a prolonged civil war in Syria.

Yet, despite scholarly and popular predictions that the contagion of protest would eventually reach every MENA regime, effectively spelling the end of authoritarianism and the onset of meaningful, sustainable democratic development across the region, this did not become a reality.⁷ Even in countries where mass protest and violent upheaval took place, calls for political liberalization have failed to manifest as democracy.⁸ While protests in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya successfully unseated existing governments, well-functioning, thriving democracies have not yet materialized; authoritarian collapse on its own “is not a sufficient condition for such [democratic] transition.”⁹

Perhaps even more interestingly, several prominent authoritarian regimes not only survived, but experienced virtually no popular anti-government uprising. As Eva Bellin notes, “The limited geographical reach of the Arab Spring is one of the most important observations to

⁵ Farzaneh Roudi, *Youth Population and Employment in the Middle East and North Africa: Opportunity or Challenge?* (New York: The United Nations, 2011), accessed January 15, 2015, http://www.un.org/esa/population/meetings/egm-adolescents/p06_roudi.pdf.

⁶ Farzaneh Roudi, *Youth Population and Employment in the Middle East and North Africa*.

⁷ Shadi Hamid, Brookings Center for Middle East Policy, in Danahar, *The New Middle East*, 28-29.

⁸ “The Arab World: Tethered by History,” *The Economist*, July 5, 2014, accessed December 10, 2014, <http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21606286-failures-arab-spring-were-long-time-making-tethered-history>.

⁹ Eva Bellin, “A Modest Transformation: Political Change in the Arab World after the ‘Arab Spring,’” in *The Arab Spring: Will it Lead to Democratic Transitions?*, ed. Clement Henry and Jang Ji-Hyang (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 37.

make... While every country in the region had citizens receptive to the contagion of the 'awakening,' in fact, the vast majority of Arab countries successfully avoided the mass mobilization of protest."¹⁰ In particular, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) – are a specific collection of states – united by geographic proximity and economic practices and interests – in the region that escaped the Arab Spring virtually unscathed. However, GCC countries have much in common with countries such as Egypt and Libya, which were overwhelmed by mass mobilization and anti-regime uprisings; all had authoritarian, non-democratic governments, and the GCC member countries and Libya are all oil-rich states. The goal of this thesis is to address this puzzle: Why did the Arab Spring unevenly affect the MENA region? Why did some of these authoritarian states experience violent government overthrow, chaos, and prolonged civil war while others remained virtually unaffected by the “contagion” of the Arab Spring – essentially, what explains the “partial contagion” that appears to have occurred?

This thesis hypothesizes that the answer to this puzzle lies in labor force demographics. All of the six GCC countries have sizable non-Arab, Asian migrant worker populations; this is an economic variable common to all six GCC nations that, unlike oil, is not also present in countries that experienced uprising and overthrow (e.g. Libya). On the whole, these nations did not undergo appreciable unrest or massive anti-government social movements, and all of them rely heavily on exploiting cheap and reliable South Asian migrant labor on major scales. All of these nations, unlike MENA countries that underwent substantial anti-government uprising, and in some cases, regime overthrow, employ non-Arab migrant workers in construction and industrial

¹⁰ Eva Bellin, "A Modest Transformation: Political Change in the Arab World after the 'Arab Spring,'" 35.

development-related projects. Essentially, the GCC labor force dominated by non-Arab, mostly South Asian migrant workers, is largely responsible for these nations' relative lack of uprising.¹¹

As this paper will explain, these foreign workers' employment in such huge numbers helps to explain variation in unrest during the Arab Spring via several interrelated causal mechanisms: first, the combination of low domestic unemployment and workforces dominated by foreign labor in the GCC indicates certain fiscal preconditions that both attract and sustain massive migrant populations, and levels of fiscal stability that diminish discontent (e.g. employment opportunities are not lacking relative to other MENA nations with much higher domestic unemployment rates and negligible or zero migrant worker populations). Second, these migrant workers strike, in direct contravention of anti-union statutes in GCC countries, and are often punished – imprisoned, threatened with violence, and/or deported – for their collective action.¹² By way of demonstration effect, migrant laborers' strikes and the ensuing consequences effectively diminished the likelihood of GCC citizens taking up similar behavior against their respective governments.

Research Methodology

This thesis adopts a qualitative and quantitative data-driven approach to explore and assess several arguments concerning the patterns of Arab Spring uprisings across the region. First, the theory of protest diffusion will be discussed to explore why the Arab Spring spread to a select few MENA nations while others completely avoided protest. The following section will

¹¹ Andrzej Kapiszewski, *Arab Versus Asian Migrant Workers in the GCC Countries*, Beirut: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Secretariat, 2006, 3, accessed April 27, 2014, http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/events/pdf/expert/11/P02_Kapiszewski.pdf

¹² Dan McDougal, "Tourists Targeted as Dubai Workers Stage Revolt: 'Exploited' Migrant Labourers Take Their Protest to the Luxury Malls They Built," *The Guardian Weekly* (Dubai), April 14, 2006, accessed December 10, 2014, LexisNexis Academic.

review existing hypotheses in the relevant literature that aims to explain variation in the Arab Spring. Next, the labor force demographics hypothesis will be presented, and data on labor force demographics in the GCC nations, in conjunction with other fiscal health indicators, including unemployment rates collected from the World Bank, will be offered in support of this theory. In addition to fiscal indicators and labor force demographics, analysis of data gathered from the Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone (GDELT) on labor-related and anti-government protests in the GCC and other selected MENA nations further supports the hypothesis that protests did not diffuse to the GCC in any sustained or meaningful way due to the demonstration effect of migrant labor uprisings. This data supports the contention that both the demonstration effect and preexisting economic conditions that attracted non-Arab migrant workers to the GCC meaningfully explain political variation across the MENA region during the Arab Spring.

After the literature and data are reviewed and analyzed, this thesis presents three case studies of countries with varying experiences of the Arab Spring. These nations – Libya, Bahrain, and Qatar – were selected because each demonstrates useful variation in the independent and dependent variables of interest. The quantitative data marshaled here has its limitations, and therefore case studies are useful to draw out the analysis. Libya is used to address the failure of existing hypotheses and explanations for why certain regimes collapsed and others remained unharmed during the course of the Arab Spring. Libya correlates with the Gulf nations in terms of several independent variables, such as oil wealth, but Libya is missing a non-Arab migrant labor force. Bahrain is profiled in anticipation of potential criticism of the hypothesis advanced in this thesis. Bahrain could be read as an exception to the general theory that this paper argues explains regional variation in the Arab Spring uprisings because Bahrain experienced some collective organization against the government, but protests were quickly put

down with the help of the Saudi Arabian government.¹³ The exceptional aspects of the Bahraini case will be explored to show that the experience of this one country, while it departs from the GCC on the whole, does not undermine the overarching hypothesis presented in this thesis. Finally, Qatar is the positive case that illustrates how labor force demographics influenced political activity and outcomes in the MENA region during the Arab Spring. Qatar has an overwhelming Asian migrant labor force and experienced no mass protest during the Arab Spring. The final section of this thesis concludes and discusses implications of this work.

Chapter II: Theoretical Approaches to Protest Diffusion

*“Rebellion is a very complicated matter that cannot be reduced to a few variables.”*¹⁴

Overview

Mohammed Bouazizi’s act of self-immolation symbolized the desperation of people throughout the MENA region; the very public and publicized death of a poor Tunisian fruit vendor in turn led to a much broader, long-term “fight against corrupt regimes, unemployment and inflation.”¹⁵ First in Tunisia and then in Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria, autocrats faced credible threats and regimes collapsed under pressure from populations that no longer remained silent in the face of social, political and economic repression. In the space of one year, several

¹³ Ahmed Kanna, "A Politics of Non-Recognition? Biopolitics of Arab Gulf Worker Protests in the Year of Uprisings," *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements* 4, no. 1 (May 2012): 152, accessed April 27, 2014, <http://www.interfacejournal.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Interface-4-1-Kanna.pdf>; "Bahrain Profile," *BBC News*, September 19, 2013, accessed April 27, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14540571>.

¹⁴ Roger D. Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 79.

¹⁵ Mohamed A.J. Althani, *The Arab Spring and the Gulf States: Time to Embrace Change* (London: Profile Books, 2012), 69.

leaders were overthrown and in Syria, a civil war had begun in the name of liberalization and reform.

On the whole, mass mobilization and anti-regime protests during the Arab Spring can be explained by general fatigue with autocratic governments; the countries that experienced major unrest and regime collapse were similar in “their aging leaders and corrupt and ineffectual governments [and] their educated, unemployed and disaffected youth.”¹⁶ After Bouazizi’s death, protests began in Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali’s Tunisia, where the government “tightly restricted free expression and political parties.”¹⁷ Labor strikes by disenchanted and desperate Tunisians “fueled protests;” the “unusually personalist and predatory” nature of Ben Ali’s corruption was no longer sustainable, and Ben Ali fled the country amidst the growing unrest.¹⁸ In Tunisia, the military’s ironic inaction also played an important role; the military’s “refusal to support Ben Ali contributed to the country’s revolution.”¹⁹

A similar dynamic occurred in Egypt: the military “sided with the protesters” and helped to oust Hosni Mubarak’s long-standing regime.²⁰ The spread of anti-regime fervor from Tunisia to Egypt can be explained partly by demonstration effect and by cultural and socioeconomic similarities: in both countries, an under- and unemployed youth population grew desperate. Just as labor protests grew into politicized anti-regime movements in Tunisia, in Egypt, “the government’s deteriorating ability to provide basic services and seeming indifference to

¹⁶ Lisa Anderson, “Demystifying the Arab Spring: Parsing the Differences Between Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya,” *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 3 (May/June 2011): 3, accessed February 8, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23039401>.

¹⁷ Anderson, “Demystifying the Arab Spring,” 3.

¹⁸ Anderson, “Demystifying the Arab Spring,” 3-4.

¹⁹ Anderson, “Demystifying the Arab Spring,” 3.

²⁰ F. Gregory Gause, III, “Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring: The Myth of Authoritarian Stability,” *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 4 (July/August 2011): 84, accessed December 15, 2014, <http://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/fora90&div=67&id=&page=>.

widespread unemployment and poverty alienated tens of millions of Egyptians.”²¹ Egypt’s “bulging” youth population with little or no opportunity for upward social mobility and seemingly zero employment prospects drove them to the streets.²² As a former labor-exporting country to the GCC, the “deliberate reduction by the GCC of workers from the Arab region and growing preference for South Asian workers” directly affected Egyptian youth searching for employment.²³ The ramifications of this shift in labor preference and subsequent labor force demographics in the GCC, and their explanatory power regarding the Arab Spring, are discussed in a later section.

Protests and regime collapse in Muammar Gaddafi’s Libya, discussed in more detail in the case study portion of this thesis, were similar to Egypt and Tunisia in their ousting of a long-standing, corrupt autocrat, by demanding “jobs, services, and an end to the mafia-like state that had terrorized and humiliated [Libyans] for decades.”²⁴ However, what differed in Libya was the role played by “cleavages of kinship and region.”²⁵ This is significant because the military in Libya splintered in the face of protest; some units remained loyal to the Gaddafi family, while others “defected to the opposition, stayed on the sidelines, or just [went] home.”²⁶ The loss of control over the military meant that preempting and putting down protests when they erupted became increasingly difficult for the civilian regime.

²¹ Anderson, “Demystifying the Arab Spring,” 4.

²² Barry Mirkin, *Arab Spring: Demographics in a Region in Transition*, Arab Human Development Report (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2013), 10, accessed April 27, 2014, <http://www.arab-hdr.org/publications/other/ahdrps/AHDR%20ENG%20Arab%20Spring%20Mirkinv3.pdf>.

²³ Mirkin, *Arab Spring: Demographics in a Region in Transition*, 17.

²⁴ Alison Pargeter, *Libya: The Rise and Fall of Qaddafi* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 2.

²⁵ Anderson, “Demystifying the Arab Spring,” 6.

²⁶ Gause, “Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring,” 84.

Libyans distrusted not only their tyrannical government, but one another, leading to a protracted civil war: “The revolution in Libya was unique among those of the Arab Spring because it was absolute.”²⁷ Protests that, as in Tunisia and Egypt, began as nonviolent demonstrations, escalated after Gaddafi “launched a brutal crackdown” against his own people.²⁸ This led to an all-out, violent civil war that spelled the implosion of the Libyan regime and civil society. Eventually, NATO involvement and intervention, a decision justified by humanitarian intentions, “enabled the Libyan opposition to overthrow one of the world's longest-ruling dictators.”²⁹

Why the Arab Spring occurred when and where it did has preoccupied many scholars. As a region, MENA has perhaps the last remaining geographic concentration of authoritarian governments of varying degrees and kinds in the 21st century; with the exceptions of Israel and Turkey, all MENA nations successfully resisted, until, it appeared, the onset of the Arab Spring, the waves of democratization that swept the globe.³⁰ The cultural, economic, and ethnic homogeneity of these nations has been offered as an explanation for both the staying power and the vulnerability of the regimes that remained virtually undisturbed until mass protests threatened to, and in some cases, actually did, unseat autocrats. That this reasoning has been employed to explain both regime resilience and collapse underlines its analytical weakness and thus, its inadequacy.

²⁷ Danahar, *The New Middle East*, 326-27, emphases in original.

²⁸ Ivo H. Daalder and James G. Stavridis, “NATO's Victory in Libya,” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2012, accessed February 8, 2015, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/137073/ivo-h-daalder-and-james-g-stavridis/natos-victory-in-libya>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Samuel P. Huntington, “Democracy's Third Wave,” *Journal of Democracy* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 13, accessed February 8, 2015, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_democracy/v002/2.2huntington.pdf.

As the map below illustrates, the geographic proximity of and political, social and economic similarities among these countries helps to explain the spread of protests from Tunisia to Egypt and Libya, and eventually to Yemen and Syria. The notion of “cross-border Arab identity...a sense of common political identity despite living in 20 different states” has been offered to explain the rise and spread of anti-government protests across the MENA region during the Arab Spring.³¹ The problem with this argument is twofold: first, a shared Arab identity arguably extends beyond the nations of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria and to countries that experienced little or no uprising, and second, similar to many existing hypotheses, it explains what did happen, but fails to consider what did not. That is a primary goal of this thesis.



Figure 1: Map of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

Source: <http://www.worldmonitor.info/regions/graphics/maps/MENA.png>.

³¹ Gause, “Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring,” 87-88.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The Arab Spring left scholars and the public alike with two puzzles. First, the fact that the Arab Spring occurred at all was puzzling, but that the contagion of revolution was incomplete at best, affecting a select few nations – and therefore failing to infect the entire region – was also unexpected. Literature on the Arab Spring notes that “observers imagined mass uprisings spreading rapidly across national boundaries to replace dictator after dictator with new leaders proclaiming a dawning era of democracy and freedom.”³² Why anti-government protests only occurred in a handful of MENA nations, and why the unrest missed some nations entirely, requires further explanation. It is first important to understand why the Arab Spring occurred when it did and why and how protest diffused to certain countries to understand regional variation in the Arab Spring uprisings. The theories of “regime change cascades” and collective action diffusion are useful to consider in this context.³³

According to Hale, a regime change cascade “implies that earlier events in one country (the crossing of certain thresholds) tend to trigger or otherwise facilitate later ones in other countries.”³⁴ The events of the Arab Spring seem to illustrate a manifestation of regional regime change cascade. Bouazizi’s self-immolation and the mass uprisings that followed in Tunisia set similar collective action in motion in Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen. Essentially, the events in Tunisia fueled and even accelerated the uprisings that later took place and toppled some other governments in the region;³⁵ the symbolism of Bouazizi’s very public, gruesome death and the mass movement that followed “serve[d] as a powerful reality-simplifying heuristic that...

³² Henry E. Hale, “Regime Change Cascades: What We Have Learned from the 1848 Revolutions to the 2011 Arab Uprisings,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 16 (February 28, 2013): 332, accessed February 2, 2015, doi:10.1146/annurev-polisci-032211-212204.

³³ Hale, “Regime Change Cascades,” 332.

³⁴ Hale, “Regime Change Cascades,” 333.

³⁵ Ibid.

evoke[d] powerful emotions that prompt[ed] coordinated action.”³⁶ By the logic of the demonstration effect, Bouazizi’s death and the uprisings that followed in Tunisia “triggered a major protest wave in Egypt;” the end of the Mubarak regime then fueled similar behavior by other anti-government, pro-liberation movements in Libya, Syria and Yemen.³⁷ While this demonstration effect theory of regime change cascade helps to explain why protest diffused from Tunisia to other MENA nations, it also poses at least two more questions: why do individuals decide to participate in such mass movements, and why did certain countries and not others become “infected” with the contagion of anti-government protest?

Models of “collective behavior” – an umbrella term that includes protests and riots – help to explain why individuals engage in group action.³⁸ The threshold level model of individual choice is useful for understanding the Arab Spring protests. According to Granovetter’s “‘threshold’ model of collective behavior,” individuals choose between action and inaction (in this case, whether or not to join an anti-government protest) based on when “the actual percentage of already active people starts to dominate her or his threshold level.”³⁹ This means that individuals choose whether or not to engage in a certain behavior based on their own cost-benefit analysis of joining others already engaged in that behavior. An individual’s threshold level is “the proportion of active others at which [the individual’s] net benefit of action (total benefit minus total cost) first becomes positive... the threshold approach can be interpreted as a rational choice model.”⁴⁰ Every individual actor’s threshold level is different and unique to them; for some people, taking part in a mass movement in its early stages before thousands of others

³⁶ Hale, “Regime Change Cascades,” 336.

³⁷ Hale, “Regime Change Cascades,” 337.

³⁸ Norman Braun, “Individual Thresholds and Social Diffusion,” *Rationality and Society* 7, no. 2 (April 1995): 167, accessed February 2, 2015, doi:10.1177/1043463195007002005.

³⁹ Braun, “Individual Thresholds and Social Diffusion,” 167-68.

⁴⁰ Braun, “Individual Thresholds and Social Diffusion,” 171.

have joined may be more or less costly. Some individuals may prefer to be leaders of a movement and thus join earlier in the movement's development, and therefore calculate that they have less to lose by engaging in this behavior at this stage. Others, however, may calculate that only once hundreds or thousands of people are already protesting that their benefits outweigh potential costs of joining an existing movement.

Thus, when a critical mass of individuals made the calculation that joining the anti-government mass uprisings outweighed potential costs – a calculation brought powerfully to the forefront by Bouazizi's death – collective action took place and diffused to other similarly situated populations. In the existing literature, there is agreement that “the threshold value represents a ‘safety in numbers’ aspect: the more fellow rebels or protesters, the less chance of being individually sanctioned by the regime.”⁴¹ In the case of the Arab Spring uprisings, the “exogenous event” of Bouazizi's self-immolation and the mass action that followed clearly “influence[d] the benefit-cost considerations of individuals in the system... formerly nonactive persons [became] active.”⁴²

It is helpful to consider what individual cost-benefit analyses may have looked like in terms of calculating what would be gained or lost by participating in mass uprisings. Individual cost-benefit analyses depend critically on threshold levels of engaging in certain behavior. As Petersen argues, “the more one detests the regime, the more likely one is to accept higher risk” in engaging in what would be contextually illegal or dangerous behavior.⁴³ Individuals place subjective value on certain risks, thus varying their threshold level for participation; individuals that Petersen terms “hotheads or heroes” have very low (close to zero) threshold levels for participation and are willing to take on extreme risk (ultimate costs, including death or

⁴¹ Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion*, 23.

⁴² Braun, “Individual Thresholds and Social Diffusion,” 172.

⁴³ Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion*, 33.

imprisonment).⁴⁴ These “first actors” are essential to any mass uprising or movement; to them, the benefit of being a “hero” and receiving recognition may outweigh the costs of jeopardizing their safety or their lives.⁴⁵

During the Arab Spring, costs for individuals may have been the likelihood of imprisonment or death for participation; this cost calculation changed as more individuals elected to participate in this mass behavior. Simultaneously, the chance of individual repercussions (jail, death, etc.) decreased as more and more people engaged in “punishable” actions, and therefore the military or the regime would have more difficulty punishing every protester. Beyond costs related to personal safety, the cost of inaction – of actively choosing not to participate while everyone else in the immediate vicinity was participating – may have been high; the social stigmatization of “nonparticipation” may have been enough to incentivize individuals to join anti-regime movements.⁴⁶

Individual benefits to be gained from participating in the Arab Spring protests also varied and cannot be neatly captured, but ranged from potential recognitions of “heroism” to getting rid of a highly resented regime.⁴⁷ The perception of the government as a common enemy to an entire people may have been enough to instigate individual action.⁴⁸ Individuals may also have calculated that the overthrow of their respective governments would be beneficial to them not only politically, but economically; entrenched, normalized corruption made it difficult or impossible for middle and working-class people to make a living on which they could reasonably survive. Indeed, Bouazizi’s death symbolized the impossibility of making a living wage under conditions of extreme and prolonged corruption: “Bouazizi couldn’t get a license to sell fruit

⁴⁴ Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion*, 46.

⁴⁵ Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion*, 66-67.

⁴⁶ Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion*, 51-52.

⁴⁷ Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion*, 33.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

because he could not afford a bribe. He could not afford a bribe because without a license he wasn't allowed to sell fruit.”⁴⁹ This vicious, seemingly impermeable cycle of poverty was a driving force behind Arab Spring protests demanding more representative governments and more opportunities for upward socioeconomic mobility. On the whole, benefits to be derived from participating in anti-regime protests may have included the accumulation of social capital conferred by association with the pro-democracy movement in these nations.

Chapter III: Existing Explanations

Several existing hypotheses have been advanced to explain why the Arab Spring occurred and why some countries remained resistant both to protest and to regime change. While these theories appear persuasive on the surface, they do not withstand the scrutiny of empirical evidence and existing data. An overview of these existing hypotheses and their failure to explain variation during the Arab Spring uprisings will be provided here. First, the shortcomings of the hereditary succession, social media, and diversity hypotheses will be addressed, and then, the importance yet incompleteness of the oil wealth explanation will be discussed. Exploring the question of why certain countries experienced mass uprisings and even regime change while others remained unscathed during the Arab Spring begins to address the puzzle at the heart of this thesis. Case studies of Libya, Bahrain and Qatar in a later section will further detail the shortcomings of these hypotheses and the contribution of the labor market demographics argument in explaining the failure of protests to take hold across the entire MENA region.

⁴⁹ Danahar, *The New Middle East*, 42.

The Contagion that Wasn't: Why Succession Cannot Explain Variation

One hypothesis in the existing literature is that hereditary authoritarian regimes are particularly resistant to change. Jason Brownlee argues that hereditary succession exists in nations where rulers do not rely on any type of popular referendum (e.g. elections) to remain in power and can transfer rule to an heir (e.g. a son).⁵⁰ This transfer of power within families often maintains authoritarian governments because, according to the theory, established modes of succession confer an outward sense of stability: the process of handing off power is not only entrenched, but hereditary “transfers signal that the state’s repressive agents have rallied around the executive... to an extraordinary degree.”⁵¹ Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds posit that hereditary regimes that collapsed during the Arab Spring fell not because they were so repressive, but “because they were not sultanistic enough.”⁵²

However, this theory fails to account for the fact that governments maintained for decades by hereditary succession varied in their experiences of the Arab Spring. In several countries where mass protest and overthrow occurred, such as Egypt, and in GCC countries such as Saudi Arabia alike, authoritarian governments were dominated by “elderly leaders who were in ‘impending succession crisis’ and widely believed to be angling to install their progeny as successors.”⁵³ The inherent weakness of undemocratic transition from one unelected leader to another – Seif al-Islam, son of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, and Gamal Mubarak, son of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt are notable examples – made the Arab Spring uprisings particularly well-

⁵⁰ Jason Brownlee, "Hereditary Succession in Modern Autocracies," *World Politics* 59 (July 2007): 600.

⁵¹ Jason Brownlee, Tarek Masoud, and Andrew Reynolds, "Why the Modest Harvest?," *Journal of Democracy* 24, no. 4 (October 2013): 33, accessed February 15, 2015, doi:10.1353/jod.2013.0061.

⁵² Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds, "Why the Modest Harvest?," 34.

⁵³ Hale, "Regime Change Cascades," 346.

timed and may have contributed to their successful toppling of regimes in these countries.⁵⁴

However, the GCC monarchies and oligarchies headed by similarly aging autocrats remained

intact; Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah was estimated to be 90 years old at the time of the Arab

Spring,⁵⁵ so the ruling Al Saud family would have been selecting and grooming a successor.⁵⁶

Furthermore, hereditary succession did not necessarily predict which regimes would collapse due

to the defection of the coercive apparatus. In some cases, such as Egypt, the military eventually

defected from the Mubarak government,⁵⁷ while in other cases, such as Saudi Arabia, the

military not only remained loyal to the civilian government, but also intervened in Bahrain on

behalf of Saudi Arabia's interests.⁵⁸ Thus, hereditary succession does not account for variation

during the Arab Spring uprisings.

Hereditary succession itself does not differentiate regimes that did or did not experience anti-government uprisings during the Arab Spring, and some regimes with hereditary power handoffs in place succumbed to protests while others did not. More specifically, monarchy as a particular form of hereditary succession is not a sufficient condition to avoid protest. In Jordan, mass uprising did occur and the Jordanian monarchy made a "tactical offering of important liberalizing concessions to protesters" in order to remain in power without a sustained

⁵⁴ Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds, "Why the Modest Harvest?," 34.

⁵⁵ Toby Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring that Wasn't* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 26.

⁵⁶ Gerald Butt, "Saudi Arabia: Why Succession Could Become a Princely Tussle," *BBC News*, January 23, 2015, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29792691>.

⁵⁷ Eva Bellin, "Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring," *Comparative Politics* 44, no. 2 (January 2012): 130.

⁵⁸ Ethan Bronner and Michael Slackman, "Saudi Troops Enter Bahrain to Help Put Down Unrest," *The New York Times* (New York), March 14, 2011, accessed February 15, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/15/world/middleeast/15bahrain.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

challenge.⁵⁹ Therefore, there must be another political and economic explanation for why so few protests and zero regime changes occurred in the GCC.

Coordination Problems, Social Media, and the Role of Al Jazeera

How thousands of individual cost-benefit analyses yielded participation in anti-government movements that toppled some regimes and left others in a perpetual state of civil war requires further exploration. This leads to a discussion of how mass mobilization during the Arab Spring overcame coordination problems. Much of the literature emphasizes the role of social media and the internet as significant explanatory variables in the Arab Spring's contagion and how individuals coordinated their action to form mass movements. Eva Bellin argues that "social media... enabled the mobilization of collective action in ways that had been heretofore impossible in repressive settings."⁶⁰ However, this explanation does not withstand scrutiny. Anti-authoritarian popular protest occurred long before the advent of social media, and social media forums generally credited with spreading the Arab Spring, such as Facebook and Twitter, existed prior to 2011 and thus do not explain why the Arab Spring protests occurred when they did. Tweets and Facebook posts about the Arab Spring uprisings are also unlikely to be representative of the myriad disenchanted populations that engaged in mass protests, populations that likely had little or no regular internet and social media access to use these resources consistently to spread revolutionary attitudes. As one author acknowledges, "the internet has been used as a tool by middle-class activists; it has not been the chief factor behind the Arab Spring."⁶¹ This is not to say that the internet and social media played no role in accelerating the Arab Spring uprisings,

⁵⁹ Hale, "Regime Change Cascades," 347.

⁶⁰ Bellin, "Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism," 138.

⁶¹ Althani, *The Arab Spring and the Gulf States*, 16.

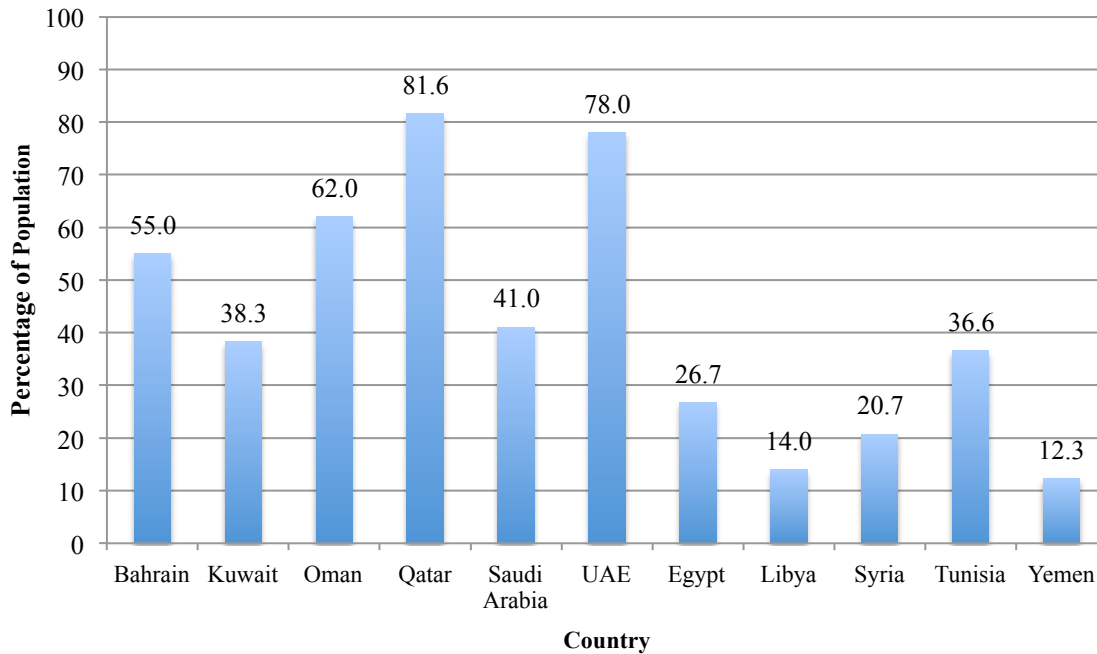
but these modes of communication were not as decisive as many scholars frame them to have been.

If social media and internet usage powerfully explain observed outcomes, then it would be expected that the use of these technologies in countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya was higher than in the GCC. However, datasets consistently demonstrate that the GCC nations had more access to the internet and more widely made use of Facebook and social media than people in Egypt, Tunisia or other uprising-affected nations. Existing data concerning both general internet usage by percentage of populations and Facebook's penetration on a country by country level do not support this explanation, and anecdotal evidence further confirms that social media could not have played the decisive role that the literature suggests.

According to data from the International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) World Telecommunication database and reprinted by the World Bank,⁶² as of 2010, GCC countries had more internet users per 100 people (percentage of population) than other MENA nations where major Arab Spring uprisings took place and in some cases, toppled governments:

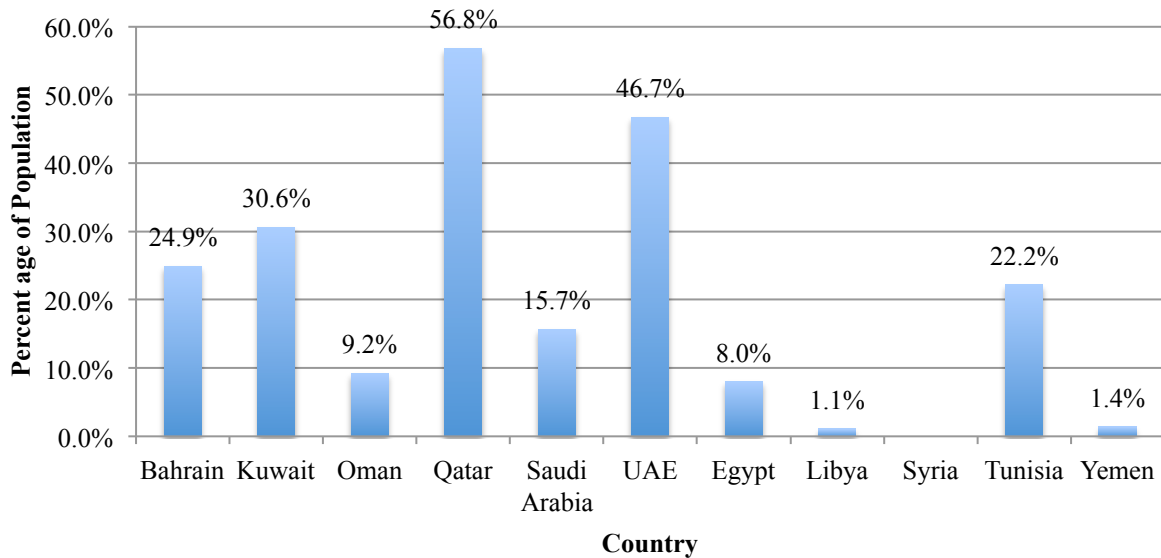
⁶² The World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2012* (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2012), 28-30, accessed February 7, 2015, <http://data.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/wdi-2012-ebook.pdf>.

Internet Usage Per 100 People (as of 2010)



Additionally, data collected from *Internet World Statistics* and mapped by TargetMap, an online service that condenses publicly available data on socioeconomic indicators, shows that Facebook penetration (the percentage of a country's population using Facebook) was consistently higher in GCC nations than in other MENA countries in the year of major Arab Spring uprisings.⁶³

⁶³ "Facebook Penetration 2011 Q1," TargetMap, last modified 2011, accessed February 7, 2015, <http://www.targetmap.com/viewer.aspx?reportId=7435>.

Facebook Penetration, Percent of Population (as of March 2011)

As Matthiesen notes, “a peculiarity of the Gulf is that social media were used... arguably even more so than in Egypt, Tunisia, or Syria. Given the wealth and high standard of living across the region... smartphone[s] and access to social media” were widespread in the GCC.⁶⁴ These observations are further complemented by anecdotal evidence. On the whole, the Arab Spring uprisings were not as neatly planned and organized on social media as many scholars have suggested. A 2012 study of the protests found that “organized movements did not drive events across the Arab world; the lead role was played by ‘loose coalitions of disparate groups and individuals.’”⁶⁵ In fact, “young revolutionaries would later recall coming across other protest marches entirely by accident.”⁶⁶

Here, the concept of protest cycles is useful to explain the growth of Arab Spring uprisings. In Egypt (and elsewhere), where uprisings began as “nonviolent tactics” such as public gatherings and the government responded with increasingly intense and violent confrontations,

⁶⁴ Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 111.

⁶⁵ Hale, “Regime Change Cascades,” 340.

⁶⁶ Danahar, *The New Middle East*, 22.

protests escalated and spread.⁶⁷ This escalation was cyclical: the first peaceful protest in Egypt took place on January 25, 2011, and police and military personnel responded with brutal force while the civilian government shut off internet and mobile phone access.⁶⁸ In fact, as Danahar reports, the Egyptian government had actually “switched the internet off and largely disabled the mobile phone network” by Egypt’s major uprising at the end of January 2011.⁶⁹ Three days later, on January 28, 2011, Egyptian protesters escalated in response to violent government crackdowns; the “demonstrations around [Cairo] couldn’t communicate with one another, but they all knew where they wanted to be, Tahrir Square. Everything else just happened.”⁷⁰

This example powerfully illustrates how protest cycles operated where governments escalated in response to civilian protest, and how protests spread and grew without access to the internet or social media. Where violence was preemptive by the government to prevent potential unrest – such as in Saudi Arabia – and, paradoxically, where the internet remained “on” – protests did not forcefully take root to challenge the government in any meaningful way. Thus, the actual roles of social media and advanced communication technology should be questioned.

A much more compelling case has been made in the literature for the influence of Al Jazeera in bringing down individual threshold levels and encouraging mass participation in a pan-Arab push for political liberalization. At the forefront of Arab news media, Al Jazeera is an international broadcasting network owned and funded by Qatar.⁷¹ The role of Al Jazeera was influential in “downplaying differences among Arab states... providing a cognitive framework

⁶⁷ Pamela E. Oliver, "Formal Models of Collective Action," *Annual Review of Sociology* 19 (1993): 282, accessed February 2, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2083389>.

⁶⁸ Danahar, *The New Middle East*, 93-94.

⁶⁹ Danahar, *The New Middle East*, 94.

⁷⁰ Danahar, *The New Middle East*, 94.

⁷¹ Shibley Telhami, "Al Jazeera: The Most Feared News Network," *Salon*, June 15, 2013, accessed March 20, 2015, http://www.salon.com/2013/06/15/al_jazeera_the_most_feared_news_network/.

for the dynamic, cascading interaction among protests and revolutions.”⁷² The creation of a shared narrative of struggling against oppression and utilizing strength in numbers against tyrannical, unrepresentative rule across the region, uniting all Arab people in a common cause, became a dominant driving force of the uprisings.⁷³ However, Al Jazeera is accessible worldwide, and given the more widespread availability of communications technologies in the Gulf, it is likely that people in the GCC had even better access to Al Jazeera than their rioting counterparts in North Africa. Therefore, Al Jazeera and access to information alone cannot explain why certain countries did not experience violent turmoil and regime overthrow during the Arab Spring.

The broad availability of and access to Al Jazeera does helpfully explain how coordination was achieved and the free-rider problem overcome in the case of Tunisian, Egyptian, Libyan and Yemeni uprisings. The free rider problem, outlined in Mancur Olson’s collective action model, posits that since collective action is anything that provides a public, collective good that is non-excludable and non-rivalrous – in the case of the Arab Spring, more democratic governance and improved socioeconomic conditions – rational actors “are motivated to free ride on the contributions of others.”⁷⁴ Why the Arab Spring uprisings that toppled regimes appear to have overcome the free rider problem can be explained by Chong’s popular mobilization model.⁷⁵

According to Chong’s model, “bandwagon rates (mobilization due to prior success)” are modified by the actions of other players in a given protest scenario – in the case of the Arab

⁷² Hale, “Regime Change Cascades,” 340.

⁷³ Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 116.

⁷⁴ Pamela E. Oliver, “Formal Models of Collective Action,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 19 (1993): 273, accessed February 2, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2083389>.

⁷⁵ Oliver, “Formal Models of Collective Action,” 282.

Spring, discontented citizens (protesters) and authoritarian governments.⁷⁶ During the Arab Spring, individuals in countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria gathered that they had more to gain from protest than from inaction, and thus engaged in collective behavior at ever-increasing rates; individuals in these contexts evaluated their participation in and goals of the movement as more valuable than the costs.⁷⁷ Al Jazeera, not necessarily the internet or social media, publicized and spread news of prior successes across the region, and encouraged mobilization for a common, pan-Arab sense of purpose and identity. With Al Jazeera's indirect help, a critical mass of individuals made the calculation that a liberalized state would be an improvement over the status quo, despite potential costs, and thus, it was "economical for [them] to contribute" to collective actions.⁷⁸ Enough people chose not to free ride that the Arab Spring uprisings both occurred and in some contexts, effectively ended the harsh rule of tyrannical autocrats.

The Diversity Argument

Another existing argument is that homogenous societies are inherently more stable than heterogeneous ones, and therefore, cultural, religious and ethnic diversity can explain cross-regional variation during the Arab Spring. Proponents of this alternative argument would point to Bahrain (discussed in depth in a later section) for its religious divides, Libya's tribal divisions, and Egypt's sectarian violence as evidence that cleavages and cross-cutting diversities are reliable predictors of unrest. This alternative argument is severely limited in its explanatory power for a few reasons. First, diversity exists everywhere and varies in kind, but the Arab

⁷⁶ Oliver, "Formal Models of Collective Action," 282.

⁷⁷ Dennis Chong, *Collective Action and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 2.

⁷⁸ Chong, *Collective Action*, 4.

Spring, and protests more generally, did not and do not occur everywhere. There are potential axes of division in all MENA nations, including GCC states; diversity in terms of socioeconomic status, religious beliefs, and political affiliations can divide any society.

Second, the Arab Spring was avoided entirely by some very diverse Middle Eastern countries, such as Lebanon.⁷⁹ Lebanon is home to Shia and Sunni Muslims, a sizable Christian population, and is a site of refuge for thousands of intra-regional refugees.⁸⁰ Therefore, the heterogeneity argument does not meaningfully or adequately explain regional variation during the Arab Spring uprisings.

Oil

Oil economics is another prominent existing explanation for why certain countries withstood the Arab Spring uprisings. Unlike hereditary succession, social media, and diversity arguments, the oil hypothesis is not inaccurate, but merely incomplete. As presented, the oil hypothesis is elementally correct – oil wealth does matter to stability and regime staying power – but not in the way currently theorized. Instead, oil wealth is important for the labor market exigencies it creates, and the labor markets and the demographics that result in oil-rich MENA nations are useful in explaining regional variation during the Arab Spring uprisings.

⁷⁹ David Kenner, "How Lebanon Dodged the Arab Spring," *Foreign Policy*, April 5, 2013, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/04/05/how-lebanon-dodged-the-arab-spring/>.

⁸⁰ Akram Al Ariss, "Religious Diversity in Lebanon: Lessons from a Small Country to the Global World," *Managing Cultural Diversity in Asia*, 2010, 60-61, accessed March 20, 2015, http://www.academia.edu/244283/Religious_diversity_in_Lebanon_lessons_from_a_small_country_to_the_global_world.

Michael Ross argues that nationalized oil resources in the MENA region have not only allowed authoritarian leaders to remain in power, but have shored up the stability of these regimes for several reasons:

“First, it has allowed them to buy off citizens by providing them with many benefits with virtually no taxation... Second, autocrats who get most of their funding from national oil industries find it easier to keep their countries' finances secret... Finally, oil wealth allows autocrats to lavishly fund - and buy the loyalty of - their armed forces.”⁸¹

By this logic, governments with massive natural resources use this wealth to buy the passivity of their people. On some level, this occurred in the context of the Arab Spring. Several Gulf countries used their astounding oil and natural resource wealth to buy off opposing factions; in Saudi Arabia, “the king announced massive spending programs... made possible by high oil prices to weather the storm,”⁸² in Kuwait, the “government announced a grant of US\$3,500 to every [citizen], as well as a year’s worth of free staples such as sugar, cooking oil, and milk,” and in Qatar, the government “declared that it would raise public-sector salaries and pensions by 60%, at a cost of more than \$8 billion.”⁸³

However, resource wealth alone is insufficient to explain variation in social mobilization during the Arab Spring. Libya is considered oil-rich, but experienced massive uprising, government overthrow and regime collapse.⁸⁴ Similar to ruling autocrats in the Gulf, Gaddafi “used oil wealth and his own unique brand of populism to keep Libyans atomized while building

⁸¹ Michael Ross, “Will Oil Drown the Arab Spring?: Democracy and the Resource Curse,” *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2011, accessed August 28, 2014, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/68200/michael-l-ross/will-oil-drown-the-arab-spring>.

⁸² Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 26.

⁸³ Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds, “Why the Modest Harvest?,” 33.

⁸⁴ Anthony O’Sullivan, Marie-Estelle Rey, and Jorge Galvez Mendez, *Opportunities and Challenges in the MENA Region* (Paris: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Investment Programme), 2, accessed April 27, 2014, <http://www.oecd.org/mena/investment/49036903.pdf>.

up a vast coercive apparatus;”⁸⁵ the Libyan regime “funnel[ed] much of its oil wealth into public handouts.”⁸⁶ That the Libyan government deployed its riches from resource wealth to coerce the Libyan people into passive acceptance of the regime suggests that there is more to understanding protest diffusion than oil wealth in the MENA region.

The following data gathered from the Central Intelligence Agency’s ranking of countries by oil production (in billions of barrels) highlights why oil wealth does not neatly correlate with experience of uprising or regime overthrow during the Arab Spring.⁸⁷

Country Name	World Rank in Oil Production (of 211 nations)	GDP (2013) ⁸⁸	Oil Wealth as Percent of GDP (2010-2014) ⁸⁹	Oil Wealth per Capita [†]
Saudi Arabia	2	\$748.4 billion	45.8%	\$11,889.25
Kuwait	6	\$175.8 billion	53.8%	\$28,073.70
United Arab Emirates	7	\$402.3 billion	21.9%	\$9,426.89
Libya	9	\$74.2 billion	52.3%	\$62.57
Qatar	12	\$203.2 billion	12.1%	\$11,335.73
Oman	22	\$79.66 billion	37.2%	\$8,159
Bahrain	68	\$32.89 billion	19.4%	\$4,790.29

⁸⁵ Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds, "Why the Modest Harvest?," 41.

⁸⁶ Associated Press, "Libyan Militias Promise Wealth in Unstable Nation," *USA Today*, March 13, 2013, accessed February 15, 2015, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2013/03/13/libya-militia-wealth/1985211/>.

⁸⁷ "Crude Oil," CIA World Factbook, last modified June 2014, accessed January 28, 2015 <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2244rank.html>.

⁸⁸ The World Bank, "Countries and Economies," *The World Bank*, last modified 2015, accessed February 15, 2015, <http://data.worldbank.org/country>.

⁸⁹ The World Bank, "Oil Rents (% of GDP)," *The World Bank*, last modified 2015, accessed February 15, 2015, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PETR.RT.ZS>.

[†] Oil wealth per capita was calculated for each country by taking the percentage of total GDP made up by oil rents and then dividing that amount by total population. All data for these calculations was gathered from the World Bank.

Qatar, which experienced no major uprising, let alone regime overthrow,⁹⁰ is ranked lower in terms of oil production – and thus reliance on resource wealth – than Libya, a country that collapsed entirely during the Arab Spring. Oil wealth is thus no longer a consistently strong indicator of the likelihood of stability; Dubai, one of the seven emirates of the UAE, which is one of the wealthiest GCC nations that experienced no uprising, is not as oil rich as other areas (e.g. Libya), but employs hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of migrant laborers in construction projects.⁹¹ Oil wealth is still important to explaining the Arab Spring uprisings because the oil industry and the projects born of it, such as large-scale construction, are largely the reasons why the Gulf states employ migrant labor on such massive scales. Therefore, oil wealth is still significant, but not in the way that the literature currently posits. Resource wealth on its own is not sufficient to explain variation, but the labor force demographics created by the exigencies of resource-rich nations usefully fill this analytical void.

⁹⁰ Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, viii.

⁹¹ McDougal, "Tourists Targeted as Dubai Workers Stage Revolt."

Chapter IV: The Hypothesis, Causal Mechanisms, and Evidence

“As paradigms fall and theories are shredded by events on the ground, it is useful to recall that the Arab revolts resulted not from policy decisions taken in Washington or any other foreign capital, but from indigenous economic, political and social factors whose dynamics were extremely hard to forecast.”⁹²

The Hypothesis

The demographics of the labor forces in the Gulf states consistently separate the GCC nations from other MENA countries. Political indicators such as authoritarianism, hereditary rule within families, and the absence of democratic infrastructure are common to all nations across the region, with the exceptions of Israel and Turkey. Similarly, oil wealth does not meaningfully distinguish the GCC from non-GCC nations that experienced massive uprising and government collapse; Libya is an oil-rich nation. Therefore, as the previous section more extensively reviewed, existing hypotheses that posit that these indicators can meaningfully explain regional variation during the Arab Spring uprisings are inadequate.

On the surface, it appears that the Arab Spring can be explained by unemployment. Nations with high unemployment rates, such as Egypt and Tunisia, were decimated by the Arab Spring uprisings.⁹³ Explanations for the problem of unemployment and its role as a driving force of the Arab Spring have rested on the issue of bulging youth populations without meaningful or sustainable opportunities for upward social mobility; absent means of gainful employment, youth in particular took to the streets to demand better from their governments.⁹⁴ Missing from this narrative is *why* such unemployment problems existed in these countries and not in other MENA

⁹² Gause, "Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring," 90.

⁹³ "Unemployment, Total (% of Total Labor Force)," The World Bank, last modified 2014, accessed April 27, 2014, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS>.

⁹⁴ Michael Hoffman and Amaney Jamal, "The Youth and the Arab Spring: Cohort Differences and Similarities," *Middle East Law and Governance* 4 (2012): 169-70, accessed December 15, 2014, doi:10.1163/187633712X632399.

nations at this particular historical moment. The Arab Spring uprisings would obviously not have occurred without thousands of individuals coming together and engaging in collective action with a common purpose. A “shared fatigue with authoritarian rule” may be the underlying emotional impetus that drove many people across the region to take to the streets and protest tyrannical rule, harsh treatment, and economic hardship,⁹⁵ but such systems of oppression existed in this region for decades, so why did the Arab Spring occur when and where it did? Since unemployment and fiscal indicators had been problems for years in these countries, these factors by themselves do not explain the timing, occurrence, or variation of the Arab Spring. Labor force demographics in the Middle East help to fill this analytical gap.

The independent variable in this hypothesis is a sizable non-Arab, mainly Asian migrant worker population. “Sizable” in this context is considered to be 50% or more of a country’s labor force.^{96††} The presence of this variable, which is consistent across the GCC nations, likely helped to produce the dependent variable, a lack of political, anti-government protests and in turn, regime stability through the course of the Arab Spring. In countries where this independent variable was absent, massive protests, regime overthrow, and in some cases, civil war, took place.

The labor force demographics hypothesis explains the overall lack of protests in the GCC countries for several interrelated reasons. First, in the GCC nations, there were reduced

⁹⁵ Muzammil M. Hussain and Philip N. Howard, "What Best Explains Successful Protest Cascades? ICTs and the Fuzzy Causes of the Arab Spring," *International Studies Review* 15 (2013): 48, accessed February 2, 2015, doi:10.1111/misr.12020.

⁹⁶ Martin Baldwin-Edwards, *Labour Immigration and Labour Markets in the GCC Countries: National Patterns and Trends*, research report no. 15 (London: Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance, and Globalisation in the Gulf States, 2011), 9, accessed April 27, 2014, <http://www.lse.ac.uk/IDEAS/programmes/kuwait/research/papers/labourimmigration.aspx>.

^{††} The exact number of Asian migrant workers in each country’s labor force does not affect results because the number of migrant workers in non-GCC MENA states is negligible or zero. Thus, the precise population of non-native Asian migrant workers in the Gulf is not necessary to differentiate meaningfully between labor force demographics in GCC versus non-GCC countries.

incentives to protest, and the demographics of these countries' labor forces are proxies for these reduced incentives. Those with the political capital to credibly challenge the government by massive, anti-regime social mobilization – citizens of GCC nations – lack the immediate motivation to do so because they benefit from the regime status quo: a continuous supply of cheap migrant labor from Asia. This cheap migrant labor is indicative of low domestic unemployment because migrant laborers fill jobs that GCC citizens do not want or would not do themselves; such levels of migrant laborers comprising the GCC workforce suggests that GCC citizens are well enough off to be able to refuse to do the menial jobs for which migrant labor is heavily imported.⁹⁷

While in some contexts foreign labor migration may be seen as a threat to domestic job markets and economies, the Asian migrant labor force in the Gulf is recognized as “pivotal to the impressive and rapid transformation of the region’s infrastructure.”⁹⁸ In fact, the Asian migrant labor force recruited by the *kafala* system in the GCC – a form of labor sponsorship between employers and migrant employees discussed at length later on – does the jobs that are considered “beneath” Gulf citizens, and therefore GCC nationals would not do these jobs regardless.⁹⁹ Additionally, immigrant populations are politically, economically and socially segregated from Gulf nationals, so the idea that labor migrants are “invading” the space of GCC citizens is not necessarily accurate.¹⁰⁰ Citizens in Gulf countries benefit so much from the *kafala* system and the migrant labor that it recruits that it would not be in their general interests to do anything to

⁹⁷ “The Middle East's Migrant Workers Forget about Rights,” *The Economist*, August 10, 2013, accessed April 27, 2014, <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21583291-attempts-improve-lot-migrants-working-middle-east-are-unlikely>.

⁹⁸ Giulia Fagotto, “The State-Migration Nexus in the Gulf in Light of the Arab Spring” (working paper, Istituto Affari Internazionali, Rome, May 2013), 5.

⁹⁹ Mohammed Harmassi, “Bahrain to End ‘Slavery’ System,” *BBC News*, May 6, 2009, accessed March 20, 2015, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8035972.stm.

¹⁰⁰ Fagotto, “The State-Migration Nexus,” 6.

unseat or upset this system; the kafala system provides Gulf employers with a steady supply of cheap, exploitable labor and the recruited migrant workers do jobs that otherwise would not be filled by citizens. Thus, the benefits that GCC citizens derive from migrant labor is dependent on the kafala system itself.

Second, cost-benefit analyses regarding the decision to protest in the GCC countries likely led individuals to calculate that the cost of protesting outweighed potential benefits not only because the economic and political status quo is largely favorable to most GCC citizens, but also because migrant laborers frequently protest in these countries and these regimes crack down rapidly and violently against protesters, thus raising the cost of engaging in such behavior. Intolerance of protests in these regimes means that governments are ready to crack down to punish such behavior if and when it arises. Since migrant laborers in these nations regularly strike and protest unfair treatment, consequences of this behavior are swift and harsh: migrant laborers who organize and stage collective strikes or protests are imprisoned, deported, or killed. By way of demonstration effect, the costs suffered by migrant laborers who protest are warnings to GCC citizens against engaging in similar behavior for fear of facing the same consequences.

As the theory of regime change cascade notes, “demonstration effects also worked in the opposite direction, driving [GCC] countries’ leaderships to crack down. Saudi Arabia actually helped other regimes brutally suppress revolutionary dissent.”¹⁰¹ Some Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia cracked down preemptively on their populations in the wake of the Arab Spring, stemming the tide of protest diffusion to these countries and helping to short-circuit potential uprisings against the government.¹⁰² After protests in Tunisia ignited similar behavior in Egypt and other MENA countries, the threat of the Arab Spring spreading to the GCC prompted

¹⁰¹ Hale, “Regime Change Cascades,” 338.

¹⁰² Ibid.

preemptive action by authoritarian Gulf states. This preemption radically changed any potential cost-benefit analysis of individuals in the Gulf contemplating engaging in collective behavior. In the context of protest intolerance, the regime is ready to crack down against popular demonstrations whenever and however they manifest.

The threat of violence against potential protesters was not the GCC's only source of reverse-demonstration effect scare tactics; the consequences of migrant laborers' non-government sanctioned, anti-institutional protests demanding better treatment were observed by GCC nationals for years, and the costs of such behavior – prison or worse – were effectively outweighed by potential benefits. The readiness and brutality of regime crackdowns against frequent migrant labor protests are significant because these costs of protesting in these contexts deter other potential protesters from engaging in this behavior. Labor protests by migrants are met with police violence, and in the case of some domestic workers in the Gulf, sexual assault.¹⁰³ While it could be argued that since migrant laborers are fundamentally disenfranchised actors without real agency in the context of GCC nations where they are forced to work in inhumane conditions, the consequences they suffer for protesting would not necessarily deter GCC nationals, who have more political agency, from engaging in similar behavior against their governments. However, as will be discussed later in this section, people in the GCC during the Arab Spring did have the inclination to protest – they created and joined online petitions and social media pages that aimed to organize anti-regime activities – but were deterred from actually taking to the streets. The demonstration effect of migrant laborers' protests and the consequences they suffered help to explain why these online movements largely failed to materialize as actual mass protests.

¹⁰³ Nick Meo, "How Dubai, the Playground of Businessmen and Warlords, is Built by Asian Wage Slaves," *The Independent* (London), March 1, 2005, accessed March 20, 2015, LexisNexis Academic.

It is further significant to note that in countries without Asian migrant labor populations, protests not only took root, but gained the support of thousands of disenchanted citizens and in some cases, toppled regimes and began civil wars. The absence of this explanatory variable is thus important to the occurrence, course, and outcomes of mass protests in the Arab Spring. In countries with substantial Asian migrant labor populations, labor force demographics and the resulting political dynamics in these nations short-circuited Arab Spring protest diffusion to the GCC countries. Where potential protesters had reduced incentives to demonstrate and where the regime regularly, publicly, and harshly put down labor strikes and protests by migrant workers, mass anti-regime collective action did not successfully manifest. This overall lack of meaningful challenge to the existing authoritarian power structures in these countries can be traced to the presence of sizable Asian migrant labor populations and what these labor force demographics in turn indicate about these countries.

Proposed Causal Mechanisms

At least two causal mechanisms underpin this hypothesis. The first is the demonstration effect. Asian migrant workers in the Gulf states are lured by promised opportunities of relatively high-paying jobs in oil and construction industries, but they are subjected to inhumane conditions upon their arrival. Most of these Asian migrants come to work in the Gulf via the kafala system, which is a form of agreement with Asian labor-sending countries that, as will be discussed in more detail in later parts of this section, tie migrant laborers to their employers, stripping them of their passports and withholding their pay to severely constrain or eliminate their mobility within the Gulf.¹⁰⁴ Thus, Asian migrant workers often strike to demand better living and working

¹⁰⁴ Michael Tierney, "The Dream Makers," *The Herald* (Glasgow), May 27, 2006, accessed December 10, 2014, LexisNexis Academic.

conditions. These strikes lead to disastrous consequences for the migrant laborers; often, labor protest participants are jailed, deported or killed. By way of demonstration effect, migrant laborers' protests function as a warning to Gulf populations that may have been considering protesting against their respective governments; the consequences for protests are so harsh in those countries, and Gulf citizens have clearly much more to lose from protesting than migrant laborers do, that the real costs of protesting for Gulf citizens outweighed potential benefits. The comments of UAE labor minister Ali al-Kaabi best summarize this causal mechanism: on the topic of rioting Asian migrant laborers, he said, those migrant laborers "'would be deported... [they] will be used as a lesson to others'" who may have been contemplating similar behavior.¹⁰⁵ This sentiment reflects the theoretical underpinnings of the demonstration effect at work during the Arab Spring: harsh punishment for a specific activity was made public in order to disincentivize other groups from engaging in the same behavior.

The only Gulf country that does not employ the kafala system and thus has more lenient policies governing migrant laborers is Bahrain. Historically, unlike other GCC nations, Bahrain has allowed labor unions to form.¹⁰⁶ This difference between Bahrain and the rest of the Gulf helps to explain why Bahrain did experience major protests that the Saudi Arabian army quashed.¹⁰⁷ Asian migrant laborers had less to protest in Bahrain, thus the demonstration effect was not as strong in Bahrain as in other GCC nations. The particularities of the Bahraini case will be discussed further in the case study section of this thesis.

The second causal mechanism that demonstrates why a sizable non-Arab migrant labor population helps to explain variation in political unrest is the issue of unemployment. While

¹⁰⁵ McDougal, "Tourists Targeted as Dubai Workers Stage Revolt."

¹⁰⁶ Abd Al-Hadi Khalaf, "Labor Movements in Bahrain," *Middle East Research and Information Project* 15 (May/June 1985), accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer132/labor-movements-bahrain>.

¹⁰⁷ Bronner and Slackman, "Saudi Troops Enter Bahrain to Help Put Down Unrest."

unemployment has been offered in the existing literature to explain the onset and spread of the Arab Spring uprisings, the root cause of unemployment in non-GCC MENA countries, and by contrast, the relatively low levels of unemployment in the GCC, is a more nuanced argument that requires exploring labor force demographics. Unemployment was high in the non-GCC nations at this historical moment because unskilled labor from Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Syria had been imported to the Gulf states until the GCC nations changed their labor preferences; Asian migrant labor supplanted intraregional migrant labor, thus leaving former labor-sending MENA countries with major unemployment problems. The literature cites several reasons for the GCC nations' shift in preferences from Arab to Asian migrant workers. In sum, GCC nations began to favor Asian migrant labor because workers from non-Arab states were easier to recruit, coerce and control; Asian migrant workers do not generally speak or understand Arabic and are thought to pose less of a political threat to internal security and stability in GCC countries.¹⁰⁸

In the remainder of this section, relevant data and anecdotal evidence will be marshaled to demonstrate the significance of the labor force demographics hypothesis, these proposed causal mechanisms, and how they operated during the Arab Spring.

Why Labor Markets?: Data and Empirical Evidence

While the causes of the Arab Spring uprisings “are numerous and complex, [they] have been exacerbated by the region’s underlying demographics.”¹⁰⁹ Unlike other variables – such as oil wealth – labor market demographics dominated by non-Arab migrant workers consistently correlate with countries that did not experience massive uprising in the Arab Spring. According to existing datasets, non-Arab (mostly Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani, and Indonesian) foreigners

¹⁰⁸ Kapiszewski, *Arab Versus Asian Migrant Workers in the GCC Countries*, 6-7.

¹⁰⁹ Mirkin, *Arab Spring: Demographics in a Region in Transition*, 7.

comprise approximately 50% or more of GCC countries' labor forces, and approximately 40% of these countries' total populations.¹¹⁰ One report estimates that the influx of Asian migrant workers swelled to "40 million by 2005," accounting for "the most rapid population growth anywhere in the world during that period."¹¹¹

Second, the GCC has undergone a fundamental shift in labor preferences. Before the onset of the Arab Spring, countries such as Egypt and Tunisia sent labor to the oil-rich and construction industry-heavy GCC countries. However, GCC nations have shown a preference for non-Arab migrant workers, most of whom come from South Asia. There are several reasons for this preference change: first, GCC governments worried about migrants from other, more politically "liberal" Arab nations coming to their countries to work and in turn, spreading anti-government concepts.¹¹² In Qatar, for example, hundreds of Egyptian workers were forcibly returned to Egypt in 1996 when Qatar accused the Egyptian government of attempting a coup.¹¹³ Second, in the post-1970s oil boom, GCC demands for cheap labor outpaced other Arab nations' supplies, and Asian governments have constructed formal agreements with GCC nations – the so-called kafala system,¹¹⁴ whereby Asian labor became more accessible and cheaper in GCC countries.¹¹⁵

The kafala system is understood as a form of sponsorship: employers or governments "sponsor" laborers' visas to enter and remain in GCC countries; the employer then controls the sponsored workers' abilities to leave the country, often by retaining their passports and work

¹¹⁰ Baldwin-Edwards, *Labour Immigration and Labour Markets*, 9; 11.

¹¹¹ Ingo Forstenlechner and Emilie Jane Rutledge, "The GCC's 'Demographic Imbalance: Perceptions, Realities and Policy Options," *Middle East Policy Council* 18, no. 4 (Winter 2011, accessed January 28, 2015, <http://www.mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/gccs-demographic-imbalance-perceptions-realities-and-policy-options?print>.

¹¹² Kapiszewski, *Arab Versus Asian Migrant Workers in the GCC Countries*, 6.

¹¹³ Kapiszewski, *Arab Versus Asian Migrant Workers in the GCC Countries*, 11.

¹¹⁴ "The Middle East's Migrant Workers Forget about Rights," *The Economist*.

¹¹⁵ Kapiszewski, *Arab Versus Asian Migrant Workers in the GCC Countries*, 7.

visas.¹¹⁶ This system was originally intended to provide short-term migrant labor to oil-exporting countries, but in the aftermath of the Gulf War and the Second Iraq War, during which times the GCC countries expelled millions of Arab laborers from geographically proximate countries interpreted to be linked and/or sympathetic to the crises, demand for Asian migrant labor increased exponentially.¹¹⁷ Misleading potential workers with promises of high wages, labor recruiters in Asian countries offer to pay the cost of laborers' travel to GCC nations, and allow laborers to repay this loan with interest over time; in reality, "the result is virtual debt bondage."¹¹⁸ Upon arrival in their GCC destination, migrant laborers' visas are taken as collateral by their employers, and their wages are kept sufficiently low as to prevent them from the ability to repay their "loans" with interest in a timely manner.¹¹⁹ This dynamic keeps laborers tethered to employers and to exploitative conditions; migrants who do not speak Arabic often sign agreements that they cannot understand that commit them to years of low wages without recourse.¹²⁰ The kafala system is sustainable despite these "bait and switch" tactics because even the promise of employment in the Gulf is often better than the status quo in some Asian labor-sending countries.¹²¹

Two interrelated causal mechanisms illustrate how labor force demographics of the GCC explain variation in social movements across the MENA region during the Arab Spring, and why

¹¹⁶ Baldwin-Edwards, *Labour Immigration and Labour Markets*, 36.

¹¹⁷ Baldwin-Edwards, *Labour Immigration and Labour Markets*, 37.

¹¹⁸ Tierney, "The Dream Makers."

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Hassan M. Fattah, "Migrants' Dreams Dry up in Dubai Desert; Anger at their Plight is Vented in Rioting," *The International Herald Tribune*, March 27, 2006, accessed December 10, 2014, LexisNexis Academic; Tierney, "The Dream Makers."

¹²¹ Andrew Gardner, "Why Do They Keep Coming?: Labor Migrants in the Gulf States," in *Migrant Labor in the Persian Gulf*, ed. Mehran Kamrava and Zahra Babar (London: Hurst and Company, 2012), 43, accessed March 20, 2015, http://www.academia.edu/1766243/Why_Do_They_Keep_Coming_Labour_Migrants_in_the_Persian_Gulf_States.

the GCC countries remained relatively stable throughout this time period. These mechanisms and their operation will be discussed in turn in this section.

Protests and the Demonstration Effect

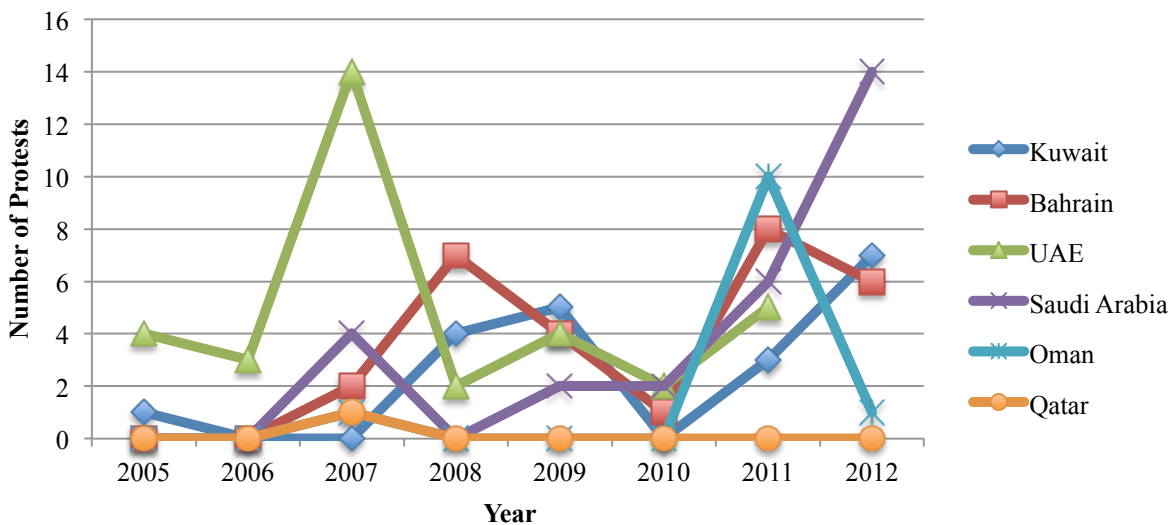
In order to analyze the demonstration effect's operation in this context, data on protest activity in the GCC and in some Arab Spring-affected MENA nations was collected. The aim of this data is to gain a better understanding of protest patterns and behavior in the region over a period of time, and to see if labor-related demonstrations by migrant workers could have operated as a deterrent. In order to understand if and how labor-related demonstrations and their aftermath affected anti-government activity in these nations before, during, and after the Arab Spring, data was retrieved from the Global Database of Events, Language and Tone (GDELT), an online research tool that collects news and media reports about events and incidents worldwide and generates download-ready spreadsheets by keyword and location searches.¹²² These GDELT searches were run for every GCC country and, for the purposes of comparison, two of the non-GCC MENA nations that experienced massive protest and regime collapse – Egypt and Libya.

Country-specific searches were conducted as follows: the data range was limited by date from January 1, 2005 to December 31, 2012 to include time before, during, and immediately after the major Arab Spring uprisings. For each GCC nation, in addition to Egypt and Libya, the following search criteria, as specified on the GDELT site, were completed as such for labor-related protests: Initiator = "Labor," Recipient Country = "Country Name," Event Code = "Protest," Event Location = "Country Name." Running searches with these parameters yielded

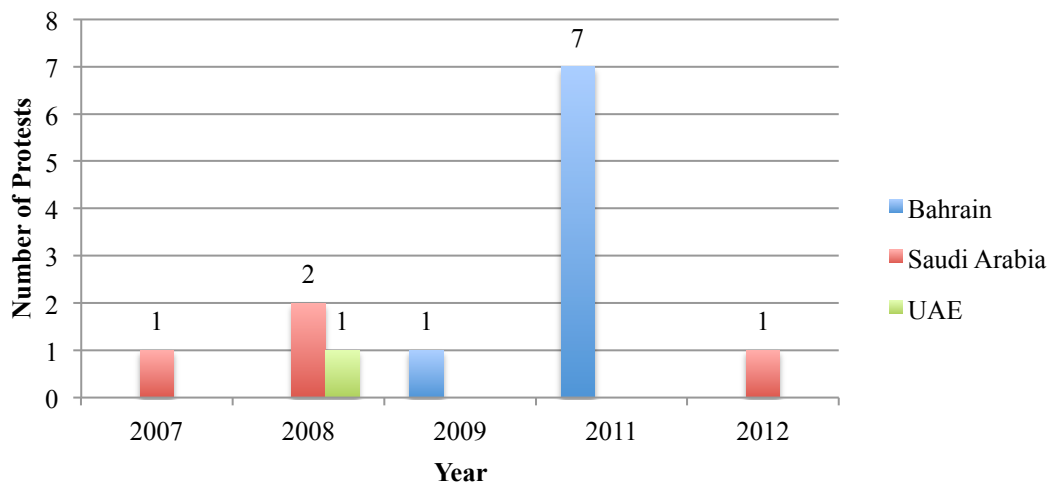
¹²² "The GDELT Project," *Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone (GDELT)*, last modified 2014, accessed January 28, 2015, <http://gdeltproject.org/>.

the graphs below, labeled respectively. To create graphs of government-related protests by civilians, searches for the same set of countries were limited by the same date range, and the following search criteria were completed as such: Initiator = “Civilian,” Recipient = “Country Name,” Recipient Type = “Government,” Event Code = “Protest,” Event Location = “Country Name.” These searches yielded the following results:

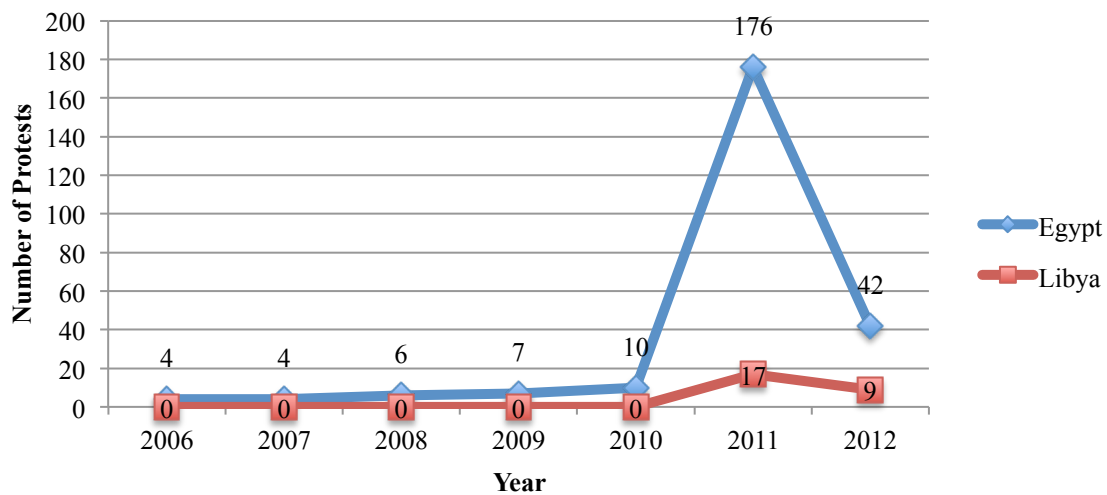
Labor-Related Protests in the GCC, by country



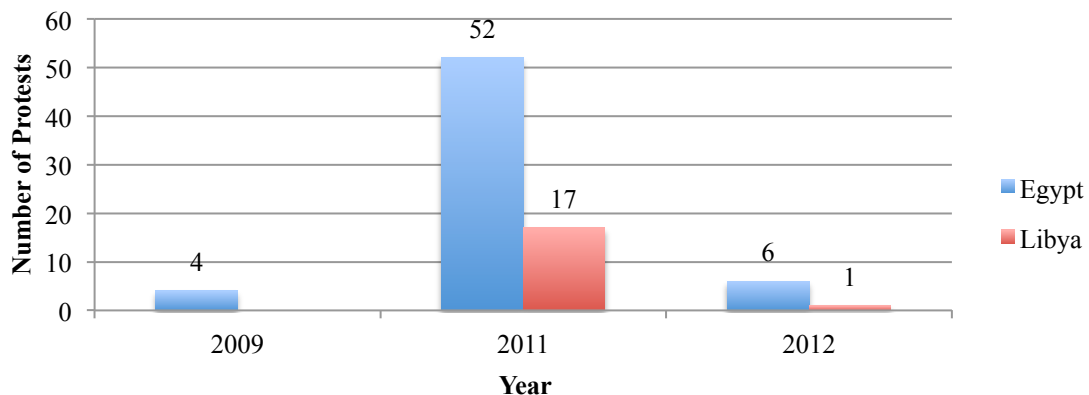
Anti-Government Protests in the GCC, 2005-2012



Labor Protests in Egypt and Libya, 2005-2012



Anti-Government Protests in Egypt and Libya, 2005-2012



At best, this data must be read as approximations of real events; GDELT data is only as accurate as the online and print media that it compiles and searches. Independent research on online databases of news media, such as Lexis Nexis, further supports this contention: searches for labor protests in Qatar between 2005 and 2012 yielded more than one incident. Additionally, some of the data that GDELT gathers may be duplicates, which is to say that the same event may be reported by various news sources and thus be counted more than once by GDELT as separate

events. It is also important to note that GDELT does not provide more detailed information on the complexities of the identities of actors in a given event – for example, who is protesting against what or whom, the fact that some workers are citizens while others are migrants/non-citizens, etc. Therefore, since some areas and countries are more widely and reliably covered by reporters than others, and since every event that occurs in every country, especially those that are toxic to the media, cannot reasonably be expected to be recorded and the same event may be cited by GDELT multiple times, GDELT data serves as an imperfect mode of approximating events. Data from GDELT is nonetheless useful because it overcomes the logistical concern of gathering information on the instances of protest in this region of the world; given time and budget constraints, data from GDELT is preferable to not citing any data at all. Additionally, this data provides both an overview of temporal trends in protest behavior and events within countries in this region.

Overall, the data cited throughout this section are at best approximations for two reasons. First, it is extremely difficult to count and to capture the number of protest events and individual migrant laborers in any country, but especially in the GCC nations; not only are many migrant workers undocumented, but GCC countries are considered “black boxes” – they rarely divulge potentially sensitive information. This is related to the second reason that this data should be considered approximations: many GCC nations do not regularly report unemployment statistics or other relevant fiscal data to the World Bank or similar international bodies. Thus, this data cannot be considered completely accurate, but rather a best estimate given logistical constraints.

Cursory glances at these graphs provide some basic understanding of the impact labor protests likely had on anti-government mass movements in the GCC. The sheer number of labor-related protests is clearly larger than instances of protest against governments in most GCC

countries. In fact, according to this data, most of the GCC did not experience any instances of anti-government protest from 2005 to 2012. If every GCC country is understood to be politically repressive, then laws that prohibit speaking out against the government in these nations do not fully explain why some countries experienced anti-government uprising over this time period while others did not. This phenomenon highlights why labor force demographics and labor strikes are significant, and how the demonstration effect may operate in this situation.

The demonstration effect posits that the observable behavior of a given group and the consequences of that behavior can meaningfully impact another group's inclination to act similarly in a comparable context. Native Arab populations (i.e. nationals) of the Gulf countries were deterred from protesting and mass collective action because the large Asian migrant worker populations in these countries organized, mobilized and staged strikes often and unsuccessfully in the years preceding and during the Arab Spring.¹²³ Governments' and corporations' abilities to quash (with the use of violent force) these protests and the negative consequences that followed for the protesters showed the national Arab population – who, unlike the migrant workers, would be salient political actors challenging their government – that to do so would be both dangerous and futile.¹²⁴ By way of cost-benefit analyses, citizens of the GCC nations calculated that, despite any anti-government sentiment or inclination to protest, to engage in similar behavior would be too risky, but for migrant laborers who are completely politically disempowered, such behavior is their means of asserting agency in an oppressive situation. Unlike GCC citizens, migrant workers calculate protest participation to be more beneficial than leaving their status quo unchallenged.

¹²³ Froilan T. Malit, Jr. and Ali Al Youha, "Labor Migration in the United Arab Emirates: Challenges and Responses," *Migration Policy Institute*, September 18, 2013, accessed April 27, 2014, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/labor-migration-united-arab-emirates-challenges-and-responses>.

¹²⁴ Kanna, "A Politics of Non-Recognition?," 147; Bellin, "Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism," 140.

All of the GCC nations experienced some form of labor-related protest in the 2005-2012 period, but only half of these countries also experienced some form of anti-government protest. Of the few cases of anti-government protest that GDELT searches yielded, what is coded as “anti-government protest” may not actually be citizens of a particular country making demands for change in their government. For example, the singular anti-government protest in the UAE after several labor-related protests reported in years prior merits further explanation. This protest, according to GDELT data, occurred in December 2008. According to the United States Department of State’s Bureau of Diplomatic Security, in order for political protests to take place in the UAE, they must first be approved by the government.¹²⁵ This particular instance of “government” protest – what is probably better understood as government-approved protest – were gatherings of people demonstrating against the conflict in the Gaza Strip.¹²⁶ Therefore, this protest did not present a major challenge to the UAE government itself; non-government sanctioned protests by workers in the UAE and the consequences of these public displays of collective action likely persuaded UAE citizens not to protest their government, if citizens were so inclined to stage a mass movement against the Emirates’ rulers.

Multiple reports of Asian laborers protesting in the UAE support this analysis. In 2006, several reports surfaced about collective action by migrant laborers in the UAE, especially in Dubai.¹²⁷ Migrant workers, many of whom came from India and Pakistan to Dubai to work on the city’s construction projects, were “angered by low salaries and mistreatment,” and they protested to demand better wages and more humane working conditions.¹²⁸ One estimate

¹²⁵ Bureau of Diplomatic Security, *United Arab Emirates 2010 Crime and Safety Report: Dubai* (United States Department of State, 2010), accessed January 28, 2015, <https://www.osac.gov/pages/ContentReportPDF.aspx?cid=9189>.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ McDougal, “Tourists Targeted as Dubai Workers Stage Revolt.”

¹²⁸ Fattah, “Migrants’ Dreams Dry up in Dubai Desert.”

concludes that Asian migrant workers in the UAE staged over “two dozen strikes” in a single year... mainly in Dubai.”¹²⁹

In November 2007, a similar event occurred: thousands of migrant laborers staged a strike at a construction worksite in Dubai.¹³⁰ Authorities arrested “about 4,000 protesters... and more than a dozen [were] deported.”¹³¹ In 2008, over a thousand migrant laborers in Dubai staged a protest over wages, only one month after “45 Indian construction workers” were jailed for the same behavior.¹³² Thus, the demonstration effect essentially “warns” those with something to lose – UAE citizens who judge anti-government protest to be too personally and/or politically costly – against such behavior, but poor, politically powerless migrant workers assess that jail, deportation, or physical harm could not be worse than their conditions that mimic indentured servitude.

The demonstration effect mechanism hinges on deterrence, which means that for the consequences of migrant laborers’ protests to dissuade Gulf citizens from protesting, GCC nationals would have had to have the inclination to protest their governments in the first place. Evidence that this inclination existed comes from online petitions and Facebook groups calling for GCC citizens to participate in protests and mobilize against their respective governments. In the UAE, an online petition calling for political liberalization and open elections was widely circulated.¹³³ In fact, the petition became so popular that online activists promoting and publicizing the petition and its message were arrested and jailed as “extremists” charged with

¹²⁹ “Anger Boils Over,” *Aberdeen American News*, March 23, 2006, accessed December 10, 2014, LexisNexis Academic.

¹³⁰ Sonia Verma, “Dark Side of Dubai’s Economic Boom Exacts Harsh Human Toll,” *The Times* (London), November 3, 2007, accessed December 10, 2014, LexisNexis Academic.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² “1,500 Laborers Stage Violent Wage Protest in UAE,” *Al Arabiya News* (Dubai, UAE), November 1, 2010, accessed January 28, 2015, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2008/03/19/47164.html>.

¹³³ Severin Carrell, “Arab Unrest: UAE Urged to Free Activists,” *The Guardian Weekly*, August 12, 2011, accessed December 15, 2014, LexisNexis Academic.

crimes against the state.¹³⁴ Similarly, in Saudi Arabia, “over ten thousand people had signed up on Facebook to participate in a Day of Rage,”¹³⁵ but no one actually took to the streets.¹³⁶ As will be discussed further in the case study section of this thesis, a similar Facebook page existed calling for mobilization in Qatar, but no anti-government protest occurred.¹³⁷ What is common to all of these countries and what also separates them from non-GCC nations where protests did occur is discontented, exploited Asian migrant laborers that dominate the domestic workforce in each of these nations; these migrant workers strike and protest frequently, facing serious and often brutal consequences. The experiences of the migrant laborers in the GCC warned Gulf nationals not to engage in the same behavior; thus, Gulf citizens’ social media movements did not manifest as protests on the streets.

Explaining Saudi Arabia and Oman

The cases of two GCC nations – Saudi Arabia and Oman – are worth discussing in greater detail. Labor protests in Saudi Arabia appear to spike in 2012 after remaining low or relatively constant in prior years. It is worth noting that these protests occurred after Saudi Arabia intervened in Bahrain to quash the anti-government liberalization movement there. Additionally, all forms of free expression are punishable by prison sentence in Saudi Arabia; according to an Amnesty International report, several cases of what the Saudi government may term a “protest” related to labor or other grievances may just be small groups of people

¹³⁴ Carrell, “Arab Unrest.”

¹³⁵ Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 28.

¹³⁶ Ian Saleh, “Saudi Arabia ‘Day of Rage’ Begins Quietly, Markets Watch Protests Closely,” *The Washington Post*, March 11, 2011, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/03/11/AR2011031103685.html>.

¹³⁷ L. Barkan, *Clashes on Facebook over Calls for Revolution in Qatar*, report no. 672, March 3, 2011, accessed February 16, 2015, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/print5058.htm>.

demanding fair treatment, distributing “state-banned books,” or merely identifying as a member of the minority Shia population.¹³⁸

The demonstration effect operated in Saudi Arabia in a very unique manner. In October 2011, Chinese laborers in Saudi Arabia staged a protest; these workers went on strike from a “rail construction project.”¹³⁹ In response, Saudi officials arrested those involved in the strike.¹⁴⁰ Despite this instance of public consequences of protest, in several Saudi Arabian provinces outside of major cities, Shia minority groups protested against the government, resulting in crackdowns on several local demonstrations to signal that to engage in such behavior is more costly than beneficial.¹⁴¹ Protesters “from the Shia minority in the Eastern Province dared defy the [protest ban].”¹⁴² The willingness of Shia communities to protest despite known danger likely stemmed from “discrimination that Saudi Shia endure, which effectively makes them second-class citizens.”¹⁴³ In fact, “a dangerous spiral of protest, repression and public funerals” maintained the fervor of Shia protests in Saudi Arabia.¹⁴⁴ Thus, the cost-benefit analysis for the populations actually engaged in these protests was fundamentally different; it is unlikely that Shia protesters would have been dissuaded by the consequences faced by protesting migrant laborers. In the case of an attempted, more centrally-located and mainstream protest that may have actually threatened the Saudi regime, “only one protester, Khalid al-Juhani, showed up and was arrested” for attempting to demonstrate – alone – in Riyadh.¹⁴⁵ In Saudi Arabia on the

¹³⁸ Amnesty International, *Annual Report 2012* (2012), accessed January 28, 2015, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/saudi-arabia/report-2012>.

¹³⁹ “Saudi Arabia ‘in Violation of all Core Labor Standards,’” *Bikya News*, January 26, 2012, accessed December 10, 2014, LexisNexis Academic.

¹⁴⁰ “Saudi Arabia ‘in Violation of all Core Labor Standards.’”

¹⁴¹ Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 29.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 73.

¹⁴⁴ Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 80.

¹⁴⁵ Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 29.

whole, the demonstration effect successfully repressed anti-government collective action that would meaningfully challenge the entrenched authoritarian regime.

Oman is also a particular case. Of the six GCC nations, “Oman was the first... to experience popular protests in January 2011.”¹⁴⁶ In Oman, “the 2011 protests were largely directed against an oligarchy perceived as corrupt and misleading the country.”¹⁴⁷ One particularly contentious issue was the failure of the government to hire Omani nationals for work on developing an industrial center in Sohar; protests were “sparked off after young unemployed people were told that there would be no job opportunities for them.”¹⁴⁸ It is worth noting that, as will be discussed in a later sub-section, Oman had the highest domestic unemployment rate of any GCC nation, and thus was perhaps already more prone to protest than the other GCC member countries. In response to unrest, the sultan of Oman met some of the demands of his people – including the creation of thousands of jobs and an increase in minimum salaries – but did not make any major or meaningful changes to the government itself.¹⁴⁹

Egypt and Libya: At the Heart of the Arab Spring

Protests in Egypt and Libya greatly departed in number, intensity, and outcome from those in the select few Gulf states that experienced some unrest. It is clear that more reporting was done on Egypt than on Libya during this time period, perhaps because of the initial magnitude of the protests and regime overthrow in Egypt immediately after protests began in Tunisia, or perhaps because of Egypt’s proximity and relationship to Israel, America’s key ally in the MENA region and a source of international fixation, or a combination of political,

¹⁴⁶ Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 112.

¹⁴⁷ Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 113.

¹⁴⁸ Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 112.

¹⁴⁹ Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 112-13.

diplomatic and economic concerns that made Egypt particularly compelling to news sources. A clear pattern emerges in this data: in both Egypt and Libya, protests related to labor and anti-government movements peaked in 2011, the height of the Arab Spring. Labor protests in Egypt are worth exploring further, and actually contribute to a causal mechanism that helps to explain why labor force demographics matter to variation in anti-government uprisings throughout the MENA region during the Arab Spring.

Economic Preconditions: Unemployment and Fiscal Indicators

Historically, Egypt was a labor-sending country to GCC economies. In the 1970s, the GCC accepted migrant labor from within the MENA region, generally from countries with little or no oil wealth and without means of employing their populations.¹⁵⁰ However, labor preferences in the GCC shifted due first to the drop in oil prices in the 1980s, when oil-producing countries scaled back their work forces, and then again in the 1990s when oil production once again became lucrative.¹⁵¹ At this point, Asian labor-sending countries designed a formal system with GCC labor-receiving governments; Asian labor forces “became a major export item” to GCC countries.¹⁵² Thus, former labor-exporting states, including Egypt and Tunisia, were left with exacerbated unemployment problems, which fueled protests in these nations.¹⁵³ As Hussain and Howard note, “access to jobs may have been a primary source of discontent in Arab Spring

¹⁵⁰ Ray Jureidini, *Migrant Workers and Xenophobia in the Middle East*, report, paper no. 2, Identities, Conflict and Cohesion Programme (Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 2003), 2, accessed January 28, 2015, [http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/%28httpAuxPages%29/045B62F1548C9C15C1256E970031D80D/\\$file/jureidin.pdf](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/%28httpAuxPages%29/045B62F1548C9C15C1256E970031D80D/$file/jureidin.pdf).

¹⁵¹ Jureidini, *Migrant Workers and Xenophobia*, 2.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Hoffman and Jamal, “The Youth and the Arab Spring,” 171.

countries, particularly in countries... where the formal unemployment rates topped 15 percent... countries with weak protest had low unemployment rates.”¹⁵⁴

Labor-related protests in Egypt are therefore hardly surprising in the 2005-2012 time period. Labor protests in Egypt had reached a level of “normalization” in the mid-2000s: “Between 2004 and 2008, more than 1.7 million [Egyptian] workers participated in contentious collective actions” that were ignored or met with no consequences.¹⁵⁵ Unlike in the GCC, organized labor unions are legal in Egypt, and thus collective action by workers is not punished to the degree that it is in the GCC; in fact, such labor-related protests in Egypt are expected.¹⁵⁶ Additionally, at this particular historical moment, unskilled labor from the poorer, less developed MENA countries that was formerly exported to the GCC nations to work on oil and construction projects was supplanted by Asian migrant workers under the kafala system; these laborers are easier to manipulate due to linguistic and cultural barriers, and have less regional mobility than Arab migrants from within the MENA states, thus helping to explain the GCC’s general preference for non-Arab migrant labor.¹⁵⁷ This shift in labor preferences helps to explain the timing and location of the Arab Spring uprisings; unemployment alone, without consideration of the underlying labor force demographics and the kafala system that explain unemployment figures, does not wield adequate explanatory power.

Unemployment figures for several MENA nations that experienced unrest and/or regime collapse during the Arab Spring contrast with those of the GCC nations:¹⁵⁸

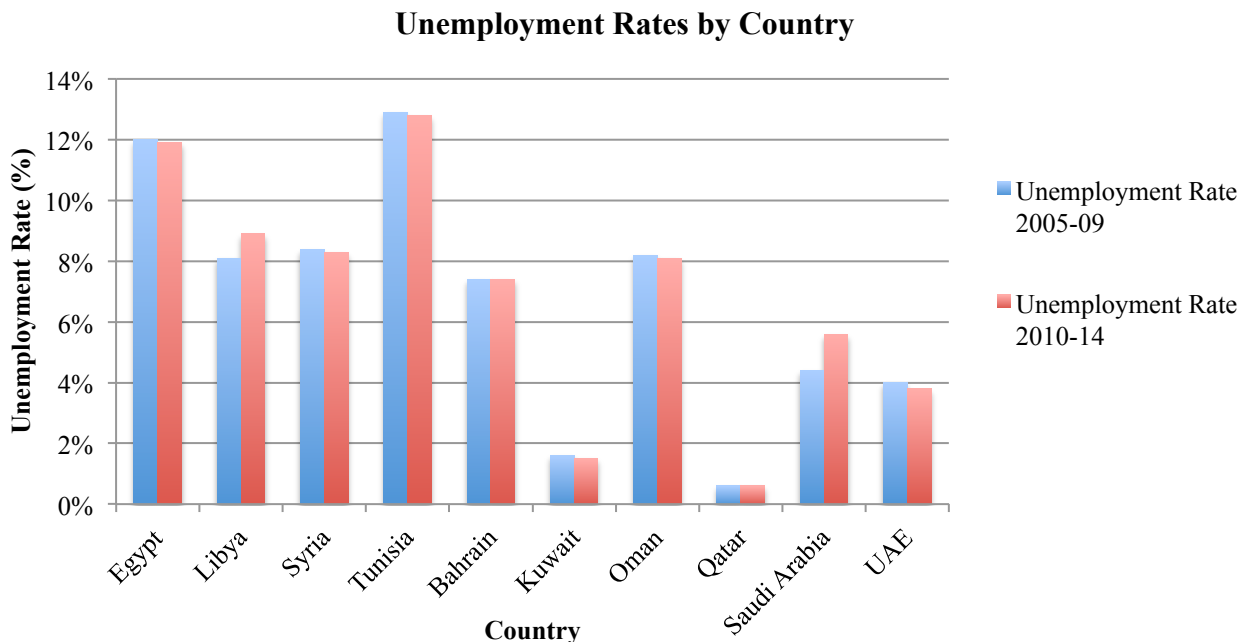
¹⁵⁴ Hussain and Howard, “What Best Explains Successful Protest Cascades?,” 53.

¹⁵⁵ Nadine Abdalla, “Egypt’s Workers: From Protest Movement to Organized Labor,” *SWP Comments* 32 (October 2012): 1, accessed February 16, 2015, http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2012C32_abn.pdf.

¹⁵⁶ Abdalla, “Egypt’s Workers,” 2.

¹⁵⁷ Tierney, “The Dream Makers.”

¹⁵⁸ “Unemployment, Total (% of Total Labor Force),” The World Bank.



Source: World Bank, Unemployment (as % of labor force)

Without employment opportunities within their respective countries or in the nations that formerly employed Arab migrants, anti-government protesters in these MENA nations demanded reforms; in particular, youth (especially young men) and young adult populations in these countries that are now “more educated and less employed” than earlier generations took to the streets in the hopes of achieving liberalization and upward social mobility.¹⁵⁹ Ironically, however, previous attempts at economic liberalization in both Egypt and Tunisia “created a new class of super-wealthy entrepreneurs,” as opposed to more equal societies with increased opportunities on the whole.¹⁶⁰

Among the Gulf nations, only Saudi Arabia’s unemployment rate increased over the period of the Arab Spring (by 0.8%); all other GCC countries’ unemployment rates remained constant or decreased over this period. In order to attract and maintain such sizable migrant labor populations, GCC nations must have major industry – oil and construction are key examples.

¹⁵⁹ Hoffman and Jamal, “The Youth and the Arab Spring,” 175.

¹⁶⁰ Gause, “Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring,” 86.

Low domestic unemployment coupled with a major industry (e.g. oil or massive construction projects) that attracts these workers to a guaranteed job with promised income explains the overwhelming presence of migrant labor in these countries.¹⁶¹ Low domestic unemployment further aids in illustrating why political unrest did not spread throughout the GCC because salient political actors in these countries – citizens/nationals – are less likely to protest a status quo that is financially rewarding. A combination of economic preconditions – low domestic unemployment and industry that requires cheap, unskilled labor forces – is a mechanism that explains why and how the GCC countries created and sustained such labor force demographics, and in turn how these demographics contributed to the overall stability and regime staying power of GCC countries relative to the non-GCC MENA nations that experienced massive protests and unrest during the Arab Spring.

The sheer number of non-Arab migrant workers in the GCC nations is difficult to measure accurately, but estimates of the total populations of these workers in the Gulf suggest the staggering impact they have on the labor forces in these countries. The table below, adapted from Baldwin-Edwards, approximates foreign migrant worker populations in the GCC countries:¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ "Unemployment, Total (% of Total Labor Force)," The World Bank.

¹⁶² Baldwin-Edwards, *Labour Immigration and Labour Markets*, 9.

Table 2. *Native and foreign components of GCC labour forces, 1975–2008 (000s)*

		1975	1985	1990	1999	2008 ^a	% female in 2008
Saudi Arabia	Nationals	1,027	1,440	1,934	3,173	4,173	16
	Foreigners	773	2,662	2,878	4,003	4,282	14
	<i>Total</i>	<i>1,800</i>	<i>4,102</i>	<i>4,812</i>	<i>7,176</i>	<i>8,455</i>	<i>15</i>
	% foreigners	42.9	64.9	59.8	55.8	50.6	
Kuwait	Nationals	92	126	118	221	351	46
	Foreigners	213	544	731	1,005	1,742	23
	<i>Total</i>	<i>305</i>	<i>670</i>	<i>849</i>	<i>1,226</i>	<i>2,093</i>	<i>27</i>
	% foreigners	69.8	81.2	86.1	82.0	83.2	
Bahrain	Nationals	46	73	127	113	139	33
	Foreigners	30	101	132	194	458	17
	<i>Total</i>	<i>76</i>	<i>174</i>	<i>259</i>	<i>307</i>	<i>597</i>	<i>20</i>
	% foreigners	39.5	58.0	51.0	63.2	76.7	
Oman	Nationals	137	167	189	312	276	n.d.
	Foreigners	71	300	442	503	809	n.d.
	<i>Total</i>	<i>208</i>	<i>467</i>	<i>631</i>	<i>815</i>	<i>1,169</i>	<i>n.d.</i>
	% foreigners	34.1	64.2	70.0	61.7	74.6	
Qatar	Nationals	13	18	21	36	72	36
	Foreigners	54	156	230	244	1,193	8
	<i>Total</i>	<i>67</i>	<i>174</i>	<i>251</i>	<i>280</i>	<i>1,265</i>	<i>10</i>
	% foreigners	80.6	89.7	91.6	87.1	94.3	
UAE	Nationals	45	72	96	124	455	22
	Foreigners	252	612	805	1,165	2,588	13
	<i>Total</i>	<i>297</i>	<i>684</i>	<i>901</i>	<i>1,289</i>	<i>3,043</i>	<i>14</i>
	% foreigners	84.8	89.5	89.3	90.4	85.0	
TOTALS	Nationals	1,360	1,896	2,485	3,979	5,466	
	Foreigners	1,393	4,375	5,218	7,114	11,072	
	<i>Total</i>	<i>2,753</i>	<i>6,271</i>	<i>7,703</i>	<i>11,093</i>	<i>16,538</i>	
	% foreigners	50.6	69.8	67.7	64.1	66.9	

While these numbers may overestimate workers in the kafala system in these countries – these estimates may include skilled foreign workers who do not participate in construction or oil sectors – this data is still useful to approximate the sheer volume of migrant labor in the GCC. Clearly, the GCC nations have attracted sizable foreign, mostly Asian, migrant labor populations to conduct “the more unappealing kinds of labor on which any society depends” and on which oil-rich nations heavily rely,¹⁶³ and have all maintained relatively low or negligible levels of unemployment throughout and since the Arab Spring.¹⁶⁴ It is worthwhile to note that no parallel migrant labor force exists in other MENA countries, including Libya, which is considered by the

¹⁶³ Kanna, "A Politics of Non-Recognition?," 152.

¹⁶⁴ "Unemployment, Total (% of Total Labor Force)," The World Bank.

CIA to be among the top ten oil producing nations in the world.¹⁶⁵ The Migrant Rights Research Centre (MRRC), an organization devoted to “advancing the rights of migrant workers throughout the Middle East,” does not report on any non-Arab migrant labor populations in countries such as Libya, Egypt or Tunisia.¹⁶⁶ MRRC profiles labor-sending and labor-receiving countries in this region; one of its only mentions of Egypt is as a labor-sending nation to Kuwait (in the late 1970s),¹⁶⁷ and another cites Egypt as a destination for refugees from Gaza.¹⁶⁸ In various reports on Asian migrant populations in MENA, only the GCC countries are mentioned as destinations.

A corollary to this causal mechanism is the importance of fiscal preconditions. Several scholars agree that particular economic conditions, especially high levels of unemployment, contributed to the onset of anti-government protests and conflicts during the Arab Spring. Tracing how labor markets as a proxy of economic conditions vary across the region is thus a useful mode of understanding how and why political unrest did not overwhelm the GCC.¹⁶⁹ According to World Bank data, all of the GCC countries are considered high-income non-OECD nations.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁵ "Crude Oil," CIA World Factbook.

¹⁶⁶ "Migrant Rights Research Centre," Migrant Rights, last modified 2015, accessed January 28, 2015, http://www.migrant-rights.org/research-centre/?research_type=statistics,reports,policies.

¹⁶⁷ Mohammed Tarik, “‘Entry Card:’ The Testimony of an Egyptian Immigrant in Kuwait,” Migrant Rights, last modified May 31, 2014, accessed January 28, 2015, <http://www.migrant-rights.org/research/entry-card-the-testimony-of-an-egyptian-immigrant-in-kuwait/>.

¹⁶⁸ Mahmoud Omar, "On Egypt; the Racist Country We Love," Migrant Rights, last modified March 29, 2014, accessed January 28, 2015, <http://www.migrant-rights.org/research/on-egypt-the-racist-country-we-love/>.

¹⁶⁹ O'Sullivan, Rey, and Mendez, *Opportunities and Challenges in the MENA Region*, 9-11; Mirkin, *Arab Spring: Demographics in a Region in Transition*, 9-11.

¹⁷⁰ "High Income: Non-OECD," The World Bank, last modified 2014, accessed December 15, 2014, <http://data.worldbank.org/income-level/NOC>.

Country	GDP (as of 2012-13)	Population
Bahrain	\$32.79 billion	1.332 million
Kuwait	\$183.2 billion	3.369 million
Oman	\$80.57 billion	3.632 million
Qatar	\$202.5 billion	2.169 million
Saudi Arabia	\$745.3 billion	28.83 million
United Arab Emirates (UAE)	\$383.8 billion	9.346 million

Source: World Bank, High Income Non-OECD Country Profiles

Gulf countries have a certain set of fundamental economic preconditions, including high levels of income, that create a sense of stability that attracts migrant workers to these countries as opposed to other resource-wealthy nations. For comparison, Libya is an oil-rich nation but is considered “developing” and is characterized by the World Bank as “upper-middle income.”¹⁷¹ Together with political climate, high levels of per capita income lead migrant laborers to believe in possibilities of obtaining wealth in these nations, however misplaced their aspirations are due to the gap between what workers are promised and the realities of migrant labor conditions in the GCC nations.¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ "Libya," The World Bank, last modified 2014, accessed December 15, 2014, <http://data.worldbank.org/country/libya>.

¹⁷² Tierney, “The Dream Makers.”

Chapter V: Three Cases

The case studies in this thesis have been selected for their important variation on key independent and dependent variables of interest. First, the case of Libya will be reviewed to highlight the shortcomings of the existing hypotheses that purport to explain the Arab Spring. Then, the experience of Bahrain will be reviewed and analyzed in anticipation of potential criticism of the hypothesis proposed in this thesis; despite its membership to the GCC, Bahrain's major protests, it will be shown, do not undermine the labor force demographics argument presented here. Finally, the case of Qatar is outlined as a "positive" example that powerfully illustrates the importance of labor force demographics in understanding variation in the Arab Spring uprisings.

The Failure of Existing Hypotheses: The Case of Libya

The collapse of Muammar Gaddafi's authoritarian regime in Libya calls several existing hypotheses that aim to explain the Arab Spring into question. Specifically, Libya's oil wealth and Gaddafi's apparent selection of his son, Seif al-Islam, to succeed him as heir to the Libyan government speak to the inadequacy of the oil and hereditary succession hypotheses, respectively.

In power for over four decades, Muammar Gaddafi created a regime that deprived Libyans of "all freedom of expression, political debate and normal civil society. The cult of Gaddafi went much deeper than that of any other Arab dictator."¹⁷³ Muammar Gaddafi rose to power in Libya by military coup that ousted the Libyan King Idris in September 1969.¹⁷⁴ Gaddafi became an absolute ruler, consolidating his control over civilian government and the Libyan

¹⁷³ Danahar, *The New Middle East*, 327.

¹⁷⁴ Pargeter, *Libya: The Rise and Fall of Qaddafi*, 59.

military, adopting the title of Colonel.¹⁷⁵ In his infamous *Green Book*, Gaddafi spelled out his opposition to the idea of democratic government; he rejected “all forms of representation” in an attempt to shore up his authoritarian rule and to legitimize his tyrannical use of power.¹⁷⁶

Over the course of one week in February 2011, protests that began in Benghazi infected major cities across Libya; by February 20, 2011, anti-government rebels had seized control of Benghazi and were threatening to topple the Gaddafi regime. Not only were protests in Libya ignited by events in Egypt and Tunisia, but the arrest of a lawyer who had “represent[ed] the relatives of prisoners killed in the 1996 [Abu Salim] prison massacre”¹⁷⁷ – an attempted prison break that resulted over a thousand inmates’ deaths by armed guards – actually accelerated Libya’s protest movement.¹⁷⁸ One month later, NATO forces began a targeted intervention in Libya, and in October 2011, Gaddafi was captured and killed in Sirte.¹⁷⁹

As the events of the Arab Spring illustrate, Gaddafi’s regime was anything but invincible. Gaddafi had created “one of the most repressive regimes in the Arab world,” but failed to withstand the force of popular protests.¹⁸⁰ The implosion of Gaddafi’s totalitarian rule calls the oil and succession hypotheses for explaining regional variation during the Arab Spring into question because Libya, like GCC nations, had both oil wealth and a regime based on autocratic hereditary rule, but experienced massive unrest and eventual collapse.

¹⁷⁵ Pargeter, *Libya: The Rise and Fall of Qaddafi*, 70.

¹⁷⁶ Pargeter, *Libya: The Rise and Fall of Qaddafi*, 86.

¹⁷⁷ Ismaeel Naar, “Timeline: Arab Spring,” *Al Jazeera*, December 17, 2013, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2013/12/timeline-arab-spring-20131217114018534352.html>.

¹⁷⁸ Evan Hill, “Libya Survivor Describes 1996 Prison Massacre,” *Al Jazeera*, October 21, 2011, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/09/20119223521462487.html>.

¹⁷⁹ Naar, “Timeline: Arab Spring.”

¹⁸⁰ Pargeter, *Libya: The Rise and Fall of Qaddafi*, 215-16.

Libya is an oil-rich nation, ranked among the top ten oil producing countries in the world.¹⁸¹ Thus, the argument that oil wealth indicated stability and relative safety from massive protest and overthrow during the Arab Spring is, at best, an oversimplification. Gaddafi failed to utilize his country's oil wealth in ways that "provid[ed] social services, and direct[ed] the development of dependent private sectors."¹⁸² This was perhaps due to Gaddafi's personalistic use of his country's oil money, wealth that he claimed as his "personal fortune."¹⁸³ In fact, the Libyan people were generally impoverished despite their country's sources of massive wealth: "Oil sustained [Gaddafi's] madness" to the detriment of his people.¹⁸⁴

Additionally, Libya never attracted a sizable (or notable) migrant worker population from the Asian labor-sending states; the overall absence of non-Arab migrant workers in Libya illustrates the country's instability, despite its wealth and the potential for there to be sectors seeking to employ cheap migrant labor. First, no such opportunities existed because, unlike in the GCC, oil wealth in Libya was not utilized to develop other industrial complexes, such as construction. Gaddafi mismanaged the oil sector in order to "use the country as a grand laboratory, frittering away cash as each hare-brained experiment took his fancy."¹⁸⁵ Second, the haphazard nature of Libya's oil economy and resource wealth abuse by Gaddafi and his immediate cronies likely made it rather difficult for the Libyan government to create any bilateral agreements with labor-sending countries in Asia; these agreements sustain the kafala

¹⁸¹ "Crude Oil," CIA World Factbook.

¹⁸² Gause, "Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring," 85.

¹⁸³ Edwin Durgy, "Did Moammar Gadhafi Die the Richest Man in the World?," *Forbes*, October 25, 2011, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/edwindurgy/2011/10/25/did-moammar-gadhafi-die-the-richest-man-in-the-world/>.

¹⁸⁴ Fouad Ajami, "The Arab Spring at One: A Year of Living Dangerously," *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 2 (March/April 2012): 60, accessed February 8, 2015, <http://heinonline.org>.

¹⁸⁵ Pargeter, *Libya: The Rise and Fall of Qaddafi*, 111.

system in the GCC and thus supply the Gulf with its migrant workforce.¹⁸⁶ Gaddafi's reputation as an international pariah probably made such "diplomatic" agreements extremely unlikely to achieve and to sustain.¹⁸⁷

On the topic of hereditary succession, Gaddafi's sons were long thought to be groomed to succeed their father.¹⁸⁸ Gaddafi had selected his son, Seif al-Islam, as his heir to perpetuate the regime,¹⁸⁹ and there was no meaningful or apparent alternative to the entrenched power structure that Gaddafi created after his military coup.¹⁹⁰ Despite Seif al-Islam's public "rejection" of his role as heir to his father's regime, he was his father's political right hand, "act[ing] as his father's official spokesman"¹⁹¹ and aiding Muammar Gaddafi "in the brutal suppression of Libya's uprising."¹⁹² While Libya degenerated into civil conflict, Seif al-Islam "vow[ed] to continue the war and retake his father's capital [from rebel forces]."¹⁹³ His actions as a political and diplomatic figure in Libya, and his assertions of power that have recently resulted in his

¹⁸⁶ Malit, Jr. and Youha, "Labor Migration in the United Arab Emirates."

¹⁸⁷ Martin Asser, "The Muammar Gaddafi Story," *BBC News*, October 21, 2011, accessed February 8, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-12688033>.

¹⁸⁸ Danahar, *The New Middle East*, 351.

¹⁸⁹ Cédric Dupont and Florence Passy, "Debate: The Arab Spring or How to Explain those Revolutionary Episodes?," *Swiss Political Science Review* 17, no. 4 (2011): 449, accessed February 8, 2015, doi:10.1111/j.1662-6370.2011.02037.x.

¹⁹⁰ Brownlee, "Hereditary Succession," 627.

¹⁹¹ Andrew Hough, "Libya: Saif al-Islam Gaddafi Detained by Rebels, ICC Confirm," *The Telegraph* (UK), August 22, 2011, accessed February 16, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/libya/8714931/Libya-Saif-al-Islam-Gaddafi-detained-by-rebels-ICC-confirm.html>.

¹⁹² Suliman Ali Zway and Kareem Fahim, "Qaddafi Son Appears on Screen at His Trial," *The New York Times* (New York), April 27, 2014, accessed February 16, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/28/world/africa/qaddafi-son-appears-on-screen-at-his-trial.html?ref=topics&_r=0.

¹⁹³ Richard Spencer, "Libya: Saif al-Islam Gaddafi Vows to Continue the War and Retake Tripoli," *The Telegraph* (Tripoli), August 31, 2011, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/libya/8734174/Libya-Saif-al-Islam-Gaddafi-vows-to-continue-the-war-and-retake-Tripoli.html>.

indictment by the International Criminal Court for war crimes, cast doubt on whether he really would have refused the position for which his father was preparing him.¹⁹⁴

As the case of Libya illustrates, the theory of hereditary succession as a determinant of regime stability in the context of the Arab Spring does not withstand close scrutiny. After protests in Tunisia and Egypt unseated authoritarian regimes, Libyan protesters similarly organized against their government and ended – rather mercilessly – the Gaddafi rule.¹⁹⁵ The case of Libya highlights that this hypothesis fails to explain why some hereditary regimes survived while others succumbed to protests and unrest.

Bahrain: Exception to the Rule?

Unlike the other GCC nations, Bahrain experienced anti-regime protest that may have threatened the country's political status quo during the Arab Spring. The Saudi Arabian military responded to and put down these protests, and the Bahraini king ultimately remained in power.¹⁹⁶ The most notable of these protests occurred on February 16-17, 2011 at the Pearl Roundabout in Manama, the capital city of the small island nation of Bahrain, a short distance from the large and powerful country of Saudi Arabia.¹⁹⁷ The nature of this protest against the Al Khalifa ruling family deserves further attention due to the particularities of the nation of Bahrain.

While this instance may be read as an exception that undermines the hypothesis presented in this thesis, Bahrain is a much more nuanced case that does not fundamentally challenge the labor force demographics hypothesis. First, Bahrain, unlike the other five GCC countries, does not employ the kafala system; this means that migrant laborers in Bahrain are arguably more free

¹⁹⁴ Zway and Fahim, "Qaddafi Son Appears on Screen at His Trial."

¹⁹⁵ Danahar, *The New Middle East*, 329.

¹⁹⁶ *BBC News*, "Bahrain Profile," September 19, 2013, accessed April 27, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14540571>.

¹⁹⁷ Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 33.

and thus have fewer reasons to protest than their counterparts in GCC countries with the oppressive kafala system.¹⁹⁸ In 2008-2009, Bahrain became the only GCC country to repeal the kafala system of sponsorship and allow migrant workers to change employers or to resign once they arrived in Bahrain.¹⁹⁹ Bahrain adopted this liberalized policy in order to “place a ceiling on the number of expatriate workers in Bahrain;” clearly, no other GCC country has much interest in limiting its supply of cheap migrant labor.²⁰⁰ By extension, this means that the demonstration effect was weaker (or nonexistent) in Bahrain than in other GCC countries where strikes by migrant laborers were consistently struck down with force. Additionally, Bahrain has a more diversified economy than other Gulf nations, and relies less on migrant labor than other GCC countries whose economies are built on oil and construction industries.²⁰¹

On a related note, protesters in Bahrain did not necessarily demand the end or total destruction of the ruling regime. As Matthiesen notes, demands were more moderate than those in the protests exploding in Egypt and Tunisia; in Bahrain, protesters took “the slogan that had galvanized protesters in Cairo and Tunis (‘The people want the fall of the regime’) but substitut[ed] *islah* (reform) for *isqat* (fall).”²⁰² While these protests are still noteworthy, they were neither as violent nor as extreme in their demands as those in non-GCC nations. It is apparent that the demands of the mostly-Shia protesters in Bahrain were generally more moderate than those of protesters in Egypt, Tunisia, or Libya because the Shia population in Bahrain had a core cluster of concerns that affected their livelihood – for example, more equal

¹⁹⁸ "Campaign to Begin against Forced Labour in the Gulf," *Himalayan Times*, January 23, 2011, accessed December 10, 2014, LexisNexis Academic.

¹⁹⁹ Andres Rodriguez, "The Kafala System in the GCC," *The Gazelle*, last modified March 15, 2014, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.thegazelle.org/issue/33/features/kefala-system/>.

²⁰⁰ Harmassi, "Bahrain to End 'Slavery' System."

²⁰¹ *BBC News*, "Bahrain Profile."

²⁰² Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 12.

housing and job opportunities and an end to favoritism of the Sunni minority.²⁰³ Although protesters in Bahrain did, in some cases, make more extreme demands – such as the dissolution of the 2002 constitution – Bahraini protesters' generally moderate demands are likely the result of their relative contentedness with their status quo versus the lived realities of their counterparts in non-GCC countries.

That demands for reform in Bahrain were more moderate may reflect that protesters in Bahrain realized the impossibility of achieving larger change; the risk of protest, especially by the disenchanting Shia majority, was clear, but not enough to deter mass movement by a religious majority ruled by a minority altogether. The overall genesis of the protests in Bahrain suggests that Bahrain was a categorically different case than the non-GCC MENA countries where mass movements were more successful.²⁰⁴

Another aspect of the case of Bahrain that is worth noting is that Sunnis control the government, but the majority of the country is Shia.²⁰⁵ The sectarian nature of the protests in Bahrain further distinguish them from demonstrations in non-GCC nations. The conflict between the ruling Sunni minority and the Shia majority that view “themselves as indigenous Bahrainis” is significant to explaining the specific circumstances of the protests in Bahrain.²⁰⁶ Religious disagreement between the citizenry and the government was thus another reason for uprisings that occurred in Bahrain but not elsewhere in the GCC. The majority of the populations in GCC

²⁰³ "Factbox: Demands of Bahrain's Protesters," *Reuters*, February 15, 2011, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/02/15/us-bahrain-protesters-idUSTRE71E3YN20110215>.

²⁰⁴ Qhelile Nyathi, "Away From Egypt, Bahrain's Own Arab Spring Uprising Heats Up Again," *Time*, August 14, 2013, accessed February 16, 2015, <http://world.time.com/2013/08/14/away-from-egypt-bahrain-own-arab-spring-uprising-heats-up-again/>.

²⁰⁵ Gause, "Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring," 84.

²⁰⁶ Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 35.

countries is Sunni, but of the 2 million Shia in the GCC, most live in Bahrain.²⁰⁷ The following table depicts the distribution of the Shia population in the GCC:

Country	Percentage of Population Identifying as Shia
Bahrain	60-70
Kuwait	20-30
Oman	<5
Qatar	10
Saudi Arabia	10-15
UAE	10-15

Source: Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 3.

Tensions between Sunni and Shia Bahrainis have run high in the small country for decades,²⁰⁸ and stem from many centuries of conflict over religious practices and the resentment of the ruled toward the ruling family.²⁰⁹ The Arab Spring in Bahrain involved “Shia protesters... demand[ing] job opportunities and democratic changes in government... the police attacked these demonstrators with tear gas and rubber bullets.”²¹⁰ When this mode of protest suppression did not work, Bahrain welcomed thousands of Saudi troops onto the island to quell the demonstrations.²¹¹

The sense of cultural and religious “otherness” that separated the majority of Bahraini citizens from their government thus made repression of protests by Bahraini and Saudi military forces easier; the “military’s willingness to shoot on civilians, facilitated by the ‘otherness’ of the

²⁰⁷ Danahar, *The New Middle East*, 236.

²⁰⁸ Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 6-7.

²⁰⁹ Miriam Joyce, *Bahrain from the Twentieth Century to the Arab Spring* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 113.

²¹⁰ Joyce, *Bahrain from the Twentieth Century*, 115-16.

²¹¹ Joyce, *Bahrain from the Twentieth Century*, 118.

protesters (mostly Shia in contrast to the Sunni ruling family and military elite) and reinforced by Saudi military support, constituted the major difference between this case and that of the first comers, Tunisia and Egypt.”²¹² Thus, despite Bahrain’s migrant labor population, its internal politics and religious turmoil between the ruled Shia majority and the ruling Sunni minority made it uniquely poised to become infected with the contagion of the Arab Spring. The Bahraini regime was threatened, but not overthrown, by popular protest. The particularities of this case, therefore, cannot completely undermine the labor force demographics hypothesis.

Qatar: A Positive Case

A small yet incredibly powerful GCC nation, Qatar’s experience of the Arab Spring was a complex one. Qatar is consistently ranked the richest nation in the world per capita, surpassing geopolitical giants such as the US, the EU, and China.²¹³ It is estimated that approximately 90% of Qatar’s labor force is made up of non-national migrant workers, most of whom are from Asia.²¹⁴ Qatar’s booming oil economy, paired with its massive construction sector – at the heart of which are current projects for the 2022 FIFA World Cup – attract and sustain such a huge migrant labor force.²¹⁵ Qatar is a useful example to illustrate how the labor force demographics hypothesis operated in Gulf nations during the Arab Spring, and how this particular element influenced variation in anti-government protests at this historical moment.

Qatar employs the kafala system and enforces it ruthlessly: in Qatar, employers “routine[ly] confiscat[e]... [migrant] worker’s passports” and wield “inordinate control over

²¹² Bellin, “A Modest Transformation,” 47.

²¹³ Beth Greenfield, “The World’s Richest Countries,” *Forbes*, February 22, 2012, accessed February 8, 2015, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/bethgreenfield/2012/02/22/the-worlds-richest-countries/>.

²¹⁴ Kapiszewski, *Arab Versus Asian Migrant Workers in the GCC Countries*, 4.

²¹⁵ Michelle Chen, “Qatar Launches Into 2022 World Cup on Backs of Abused Migrants,” *The Huffington Post*, January 28, 2013, accessed February 10, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michelle-chen/qatar-launches-into-2022-_b_2556016.html.

their employees.”²¹⁶ The poor working and living conditions that migrant workers in Qatar face lead them to protest frequently; there are laws against unionization and striking in Qatar, like in other GCC nations, so the punishment for public demonstrations is severe.²¹⁷ Migrant workers who strike are jailed, deported, or face violence.²¹⁸ These policies and consequences for mass protest effectively deterred Qatari nationals from engaging in demonstrations themselves; the costs were too high and the benefits too uncertain to participate in such behavior.

In Qatar, Asian migrant workers had been striking for years before the Arab Spring occurred. In 2006, “over 2,000 workers... struck... and protested at their labor camp in Qatar demanding an increase in salary.”²¹⁹ Such behavior has resulted in jail and deportation of migrant workers who participate in these protests. The consequences of protests effectively deterred future protests by Qatari nationals.

It could be argued that since migrant workers are not citizens of Qatar and lack any political capital to meaningfully challenge the Qatari regime, the consequences of their behavior would not influence the willingness of Qatari nationals to protest themselves; the punishment for the same behavior by migrant workers and citizens would likely be different. However, any behavior interpreted to be anti-regime in Qatar, regardless of who performs the action, is subject to a jail sentence. In the context of the Arab Spring, Qatari poet Mohamed Rashid al-Ajami was given a life sentence for writing a poem that “[spread] incendiary material” that challenged the

²¹⁶ Human Rights Watch, *Qatar: Migrant Construction Workers Face Abuse* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2012), accessed February 16, 2015, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/06/12/qatar-migrant-construction-workers-face-abuse>.

²¹⁷ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2013* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2013), accessed February 16, 2015, <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2013/country-chapters/qatar>.

²¹⁸ International Trade Union Confederation, *Labour Rights in Qatar* (Brussels: International Trade Union Confederation), accessed February 16, 2015, http://www.world-psi.org/sites/default/files/attachment/news/labour_rights_in_qatar_ituc_briefing_0.pdf.

²¹⁹ “Over 2,000 Workers Go on Strike in Qatar,” *Times of India* (Dubai), June 6, 2006, accessed February 16, 2015, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/rest-of-world/Over-2000-workers-go-on-strike-in-Qatar/articleshow/1622217.cms>.

regime.²²⁰ If this was the consequence for writing a poem, the punishment for public demonstration would assumedly only be more severe.

There is evidence that such revolutionary spirit existed among the people of Qatar during the Arab Spring, but that they were effectively deterred from taking to the streets. In February 2011, a Facebook page called “The Freedom Revolution” was created to “[call] for a revolution against the regime of Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Aal Thani. Its organizers [were] protesting against the corruption rampant in the regime and the absence of real political and party life in Qatar.”²²¹ This particular page received thousands of likes, and other similar pages also gained followings.²²² However, no such revolution ever materialized in Qatar, no protest or mass mobilization took place, and the regime remained intact and unchallenged.

²²⁰ "Qatar Court Upholds Poet's Jail Sentence," *Al Jazeera* (Qatar), October 21, 2013, accessed February 16, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/10/qatar-court-upholds-sentence-against-poet-20131021123723850815.html>.

²²¹ Barkan, *Clashes on Facebook*.

²²² *Ibid.*

Chapter VI: Conclusions and Implications

The puzzle that this thesis has aimed to address is why the Arab Spring uprisings unevenly affected the MENA region. Much of the existing scholarship is preoccupied with the question of why the Arab Spring occurred in the first place, as opposed to why and where uprisings either never took root or why, in some cases, they failed so miserably. One of the goals of this thesis is to fill this identified analytical gap.

The proposed answer to this question that this thesis puts forth is that labor market demographics in the six Gulf Cooperation Council nations usefully explain why these countries experienced little or no mass protest movement during the Arab Spring. Existing hypotheses that posit the significance of hereditary authoritarianism, the role of social media, diversity, and oil wealth in explaining variation during the Arab Spring protests fail to capture the entire story. Hereditary authoritarian governments and reliance on oil wealth characterized MENA nations that succumbed to Arab Spring protests (e.g. Libya) and unaffected countries (e.g. Qatar and the UAE) alike, and therefore do not explain the absence of protest in much of the GCC. This is not to say that oil wealth is unimportant, but that it does not explain variation in the Arab Spring uprisings in the ways currently argued. Oil wealth was used to “buy off” potentially discontented populations in Libya and the GCC, and therefore the use of natural resource wealth to buy loyalty cannot explain the Arab Spring uprisings.²²³ Additionally, social media cannot explain variation by itself; social media and internet usage penetrated much more of the GCC nations’ populations than countries such as Egypt or Libya, where uprisings overthrew regimes.²²⁴ The diversity argument is similarly unsatisfactory; political, cultural, socioeconomic and religious

²²³ Ross, “Will Oil Drown the Arab Spring?”

²²⁴ “Facebook Penetration 2011 Q1,” TargetMap; Althani, *The Arab Spring and the Gulf States*,

diversity exist across the region, but the Arab Spring only manifested as protests in a select few countries. In fact, some of the more diverse nations in the MENA region, such as Lebanon, avoided the Arab Spring entirely. While no single explanation is perfect, these hypotheses miss crucial elements of the cross-regional variation in protest occurrence and success during the Arab Spring.

This thesis hypothesizes that labor market demographics meaningfully and usefully differentiate between countries that did or did not experience protest during the Arab Spring, and can explain the absence of protest in almost all of the GCC countries. According to this hypothesis, the presence of non-Arab, Asian migrant worker populations in the GCC countries in huge numbers helps to explain variation in protests across the MENA region during the Arab Spring for at least two reasons. First, these migrant labor populations in the GCC protest and strike frequently; this behavior is met with violent and harsh consequences. By way of demonstration effect, the punishments suffered by migrant workers for protesting deterred GCC citizens from protesting themselves. As Facebook pages and social media campaigns calling for “revolution” in these countries show, the inclination to protest GCC governments existed,²²⁵ but GCC nationals did not, with the exception of Bahrain, take to the streets in attempts to overthrow their respective governments. GDELT data on protest occurrence in these countries supports the contention that labor protests and strikes by migrant workers served to deter GCC citizens from protesting themselves. The cost for GCC citizens to protest their governments was too high, and would not outweigh the potential benefits; for migrant laborers who are completely socially, politically and economically disempowered in these contexts, the costs of protesting are calculated to be more favorable than their status quo.

²²⁵ Carrell, “Arab Unrest;” Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 28.

Second, the presence of Asian migrant labor in the GCC in such huge numbers – in every GCC country, Asian migrant workers make up 50% or more of the labor force – has meant that intraregional migration for jobs in the GCC has slowed or stopped.²²⁶ GCC nations historically hired unskilled labor from Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and the other poorer MENA countries, but have recently shown preference for Asian migrant labor for a number of reasons; Asian migrant workers are thought to pose less of a political threat to GCC countries, and are more easily coerced and controlled due to linguistic and cultural barriers.²²⁷ This shift in labor preferences left thousands unemployed in former MENA labor-sending countries, and helps to explain why protests occurred in those countries but not in most GCC nations. Thus, there is an important difference between what this thesis offers as a causal mechanism and what the existing literature posits is significant about unemployment and fiscal indicators in explaining the Arab Spring; unemployment existed in non-GCC MENA countries at this particular historical moment due to the shift in the Gulf's labor preferences from intraregional unskilled labor to Asian migrant workers. The kafala system and the labor it supplies to sustain major industries are thus at least somewhat responsible for the GCC's high-income status. Thus, labor force demographics help to explain why Gulf citizens were relatively more content with their status quo compared to their non-GCC counterparts, why they had fewer reasons to mobilize, and why regimes in the GCC remained virtually undisturbed by the Arab Spring.

The case studies presented in this thesis highlight variation in independent variables of interest. The case of Libya is significant because, as an oil-rich, non-GCC nation that experienced massive unrest, Libya's lack of a sizable Asian migrant labor force helps to explain protests and regime collapse. Libya shared important explanatory variables with the GCC

²²⁶ Baldwin-Edwards, *Labour Immigration and Labour Markets*, 9.

²²⁷ Mirkin, *Arab Spring: Demographics in a Region in Transition*, 10.

countries – a hereditary authoritarian mode of government and oil resources – but lacked a sizable migrant labor force and thus the demonstration effect that accompanies migrant labor protests.

Additionally, Bahrain is an important case because, as a GCC nation that experienced massive protests in which the Saudi Arabian military intervened on behalf of the Bahraini regime, it could be argued that the case of Bahrain undermines the labor force demographics hypothesis as the case of Libya undermines existing alternative hypotheses. However, Bahrain differs from the other GCC nations in two very important respects: it does not employ the kafala system, and its Shia majority is governed by a Sunni minority. Since Bahrain does not use the kafala system to recruit and coercively retain migrant laborers, Asian migrant workers in Bahrain are relatively more free to unionize and move around between employers than their counterparts in other GCC nations, and thus would be less likely to protest than migrant workers in other GCC nations that ruthlessly employ and enforce the kafala system.²²⁸ This, in turn, weakens the demonstration effect that migrant worker protests would have had on citizens' inclinations to mobilize. Second, the Shia/Sunni tensions in Bahrain separate it from the other GCC nations, where the majority of both citizens and rulers are Sunni. Religious and cultural clashes in Bahrain made it particularly ripe for protest; these protests failed largely because the government and the coercive apparatus in Bahrain regarded the protesters as "others" and thus it was easier for the regime to crack down harshly against its people.²²⁹

Finally, the case of Qatar is presented to show how the labor market demographics hypothesis operated in a GCC nation. In Qatar, as made clear by Facebook activity, people had

²²⁸ "Campaign to Begin against Forced Labour in the Gulf," *Himalayan Times*.

²²⁹ Bellin, "A Modest Transformation," 47.

the inclination to protest but never actually took to the streets against the Qatari government.²³⁰

This can be explained by the consequences suffered by migrant laborers in Qatar who protested for better wages and working conditions; Qatari citizens realized that the cost of protesting would be outweighed by any potential benefits, especially because many people in Qatar derive major advantages from a consistent supply of cheap migrant labor.

There are several implications of this research. First, protest diffusion is a complex, multivariable phenomenon. Political and cultural similarities between neighboring countries are not sufficient to predict that protest will diffuse across nations; contagion requires more than geographic proximity and baseline sociopolitical commonalities. The idea that “a wave of mass mobilization swept the broader Middle East, toppled dictators, and cleared the way for democracy” has not been and likely will not be borne out.²³¹ The failure of the Arab Spring uprisings to result in democracy across the MENA region is not simply a lack of mobilization, but a consequence of entrenched economic practices, including the exploitation of migrant labor forces and intolerance of protest that accompanies the presence of these populations. Stemming the tide of contagion via the demonstration effect and the use of preemptive crackdowns is important to consider when studying the potential for protests to take hold cross-regionally.

A second and perhaps more significant implication of this research is that labor markets and their compositions have important political consequences. In the case of the GCC, labor force demographics helped to deter citizens from protesting against their respective governments; in addition to preemptive anti-protest measures and existing statutes intolerant of popular demonstrations, the presence of Asian migrant worker populations in the GCC effectively helped these nations avoid destabilizing mass mobilization. Labor force

²³⁰ Barkan, *Clashes on Facebook*.

²³¹ Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds, “Why the Modest Harvest?,” 29.

demographics alter population compositions and intra-national relations, and in turn have significant consequences for political behavior.

The way forward for the MENA region is, at best, unclear. As cross-regional variation during the Arab Spring illustrates, the disappearance of authoritarian governments and in turn, transitions to democracy, no longer seem so assured. A sustained shift away from Asian migrant labor exploitation is doubtful; international talks on improving the human rights of these migrant laborers in the GCC have not yet resulted in any meaningful changes, and it does not appear that they will in the future.²³² If the GCC's reliance on exploited migrant labor persists, the cycle of demonstration effect and protest intolerance will likely continue unabated, and thus challenges to the GCC regimes from below seem unlikely in the foreseeable future. It appears as though Huntington's waves of democracy no longer crash as loudly or unfailingly; the tide seems to be going out.²³³

²³² Human Rights Watch, "Asia/Middle East: Increase Protections for Migrant Workers," *Human Rights Watch News*, April 16, 2012, accessed February 20, 2015, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/04/15/asiamiddle-east-increase-protections-migrant-workers>.

²³³ Huntington, "Democracy's Third Wave," 13-14.

Appendix – GDELT Data

Labor-Related Protests in the GCC, 2005-2012

Year	Country Name	Number of Protests
2005	Kuwait	1
	UAE	4
2006	UAE	3
2007	Bahrain	2
	Oman	1
	Qatar	1
	Saudi Arabia	4
	UAE	14
2008	Bahrain	7
	Kuwait	4
	UAE	2
2009	Bahrain	4
	Kuwait	5
	Saudi Arabia	2
	UAE	4
2010	Bahrain	1
	Saudi Arabia	2
	UAE	2
2011	Bahrain	8
	Kuwait	3
	Oman	10
	Saudi Arabia	6
	UAE	5
2012	Bahrain	6
	Kuwait	7
	Oman	1
	Saudi Arabia	14

Ant-Government Protests in the GCC, 2005-2012

Year	Country Name	Number of Protests
2007	Saudi Arabia	1
2008	Saudi Arabia	2
	UAE	1
2009	Bahrain	1
2011	Bahrain	7
2012	Saudi Arabia	1

Labor Protests in Egypt and Libya, 2005-2012

Year	Country Name	Number of Protests
2006	Egypt	4
2007	Egypt	4
2008	Egypt	6
2009	Egypt	7
2010	Egypt	10
2011	Egypt	176
	Libya	17
2012	Egypt	42
	Libya	9

Anti-Government Protests in Egypt and Libya, 2005-2012

Year	Country Name	Number of Protests
2009	Egypt	4
2011	Egypt	52
	Libya	17
2012	Egypt	6
	Libya	1

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